

# Caregiver Burnout

By Dr. M. Ross Seligson

Being able to cope with the strains and stresses of being a Caregiver is part of the art of Caregiving. In order to remain healthy so that we can continue to be Caregivers, we must be able to see our own limitations and learn to care for ourselves as well as others.

It is important for all of us to make the effort to recognize the signs of burnout. In order to do this we must be honest and willing to hear feedback from those around us. This is especially important for those caring for family or friends. Too often Caregivers who are not closely associated with the healthcare profession get overlooked and lost in the commotion of medical emergencies and procedures. Otherwise close friends begin to grow distant, and eventually the Caregiver is alone without a support structure. We must allow those who do care for us, who are interested enough to say something, to tell us about our behavior, a noticed decrease in energy or mood changes.

Burnout isn't like a cold. You don't always notice it when you are in its clutches. Very much like Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, the symptoms of burnout can begin surfacing months after a traumatic episode. The following are symptoms we might notice in ourselves, or others might say they see in us. Think about what is being said, and consider the possibility of burnout.

- Feelings of depression.
- A sense of ongoing and constant fatigue.
- Decreasing interest in work.
- Decrease in work production.
- Withdrawal from social contacts.
- Increase in use of stimulants and alcohol.
- Increasing fear of death.
- Change in eating patterns.
- Feelings of helplessness.

Strategies to ward off or cope with burnout are important. To counteract burnout, the following specific strategies are recommended

- Participate in a support network.
- Consult with professionals to explore burnout issues.
- Attend a support group to receive feedback and coping strategies.
- Vary the focus of caregiving responsibilities if possible (rotate responsibilities with family members).
- Exercise daily and maintain a healthy diet.
- Establish "quiet time" for meditation.
- Get a weekly massage
- Stay involved in hobbies.

By acknowledging the reality that being a Caregiver is filled with stress and anxiety, and understanding the potential for burnout, Caregivers can be forewarned and guard against this debilitating condition. As much as it is said, it can still not be said too often, the best way to be an effective Caregiver is to take care of yourself.

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