

# Healthcare Spotlight

## Recognizing the Need for Outside Help in Caregiving

by NANCY WEBRE, BS, MS of Evergreen In-Home Care Services

Caregivers caring for a loved one often don't recognize when they are in over their heads and often find themselves at a breaking point. After a prolonged period of time, caregiving can become too difficult to endure any longer. Short-term, the caregiver can handle it. Long-term, help is needed.

A typical pattern with an overloaded caregiver and/or family member may unfold as follows:

1 to 18 months – the caregiver is confident, has everything under control and is coping well. Other family members and friends are lending support.

20 to 36 months – the caregiver may be taking medication to sleep and control mood swings. Outside help dwindles away and except for trips to the store or doctor, the caregiver has severed most social contacts. Often, the caregiver feels alone and helpless.

38 to 50 months – the caregiver's physical health is beginning to deteriorate often requiring tranquilizers or antidepressants. Lack of focus and sheer fatigue cloud judgment and the caregiver is often unable to make rational decisions or ask for help.

It is often at this stage that family or friends intervene and find other solutions for care. This may include respite care, hiring outside caregivers or putting the loved one in a care facility. Without intervention, the caregiver may become a candidate for long term care as well.

Caregivers often feel even more stress during the holiday season with planning, shopping and participating in holiday activities. This is a perfect time for family and friends to step up and provide some respite time and caregiving help. Whether it is provided personally or arranged as a gift of services to be provided by a professional in-home care agency, it is a

welcome gift.

An article in *Today's Caregiver* states: "Nearly one in four caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias provide 40 hours a week or more of care. 71 percent sustain this commitment for more than a year, and 32 percent do so for five years or more. One of the best gifts you can give someone caring for an individual with Alzheimer's is something that relieves the stress or provides a bit of respite for the caregiver. The gift of time: Cost effective and truly meaningful gifts are self-made coupons for cleaning the house, preparing a meal, mowing the lawn or providing yard work, respite times that allow the primary caregiver time off to focus on what he/she needs."



Nancy Webre, BS MS

It is also important to note that hiring professional care provider services can provide valuable ongoing support to an overloaded caregiver. If you are the one providing daily care for a loved one, you owe it to yourself to seek help. Take care of yourself and your needs both mentally and physically. Seek out professional help that will ease your burden and look for community service organizations that offer respite help.

The National Care Planning Council's website [www.longtermcarelink.net](http://www.longtermcarelink.net) contains hundreds of articles with tips and advice for caregivers and their families. Take a few minutes to find the help you need as you welcome in the New Year.

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