

Caregivers health also needs attention

By Ellen Waldman

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When I meet with a family concerned about an aging parent or spouse, what's often first in their minds is arranging for this person's care needs. What too often gets overlooked is considering how to take care of themselves as the primary caregiver in this scenario.

I'd like to believe that most people put themselves on the list of those who need care, but this is rarely the case. What ends up happening according to the statistics, is that the caregiver's health and life are in serious jeopardy. This is due to the stress and sometimes relentless tasks of caring for a loved one. Here's where the need for some respite care comes into play.

The National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institute of Health, defines respite care as this. "Respite care provides short-term relief for primary caregivers. It can be arranged for just an afternoon or for several days or weeks. Care can be provided at home, in a health care facility or at an adult day center."

Basically, respite care provides relief for the caregiver who gets tired and needs a break. The type of support and the frequency is different for everyone and also changes as the person's care needs change.

One way this gets addressed most frequently is to bring in a paid caregiver for some hours each week. During this time, the one needing respite goes out for a break or finds some space in their own home for themselves. All licensed caregiving agencies in Medford can find a good fit to match the care needs of each situation.

Another option for some daytime respite is Lifespan Respite Social Club offered through the ARC of Jackson County (541-821-8764). I've written about them before and they are still offering services for seniors and adults with disabilities.

But what is new in Ashland is the "Circle of Care" at the Village at Valley View (VVV). I spoke to Melissa Harris, community relations director (541-690-6991; mharris@villagevalleyview.com), for more information about their program. To provide respite for caregivers, they offer overnight placement for a person who has a diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's for a few days, weeks, or even longer if needed. There are actually no stay limitations.

This respite resident will then enjoy all the amenities and services provided to all their residents: three meals a day plus snacks, medication management, and activities for life enrichment. In the case of respite care, the apartment is fully furnished as well.

They currently have one dedicated apartment for respite care. It can hold two people at the same time, and if space is available, it's possible the resident could have their own room. When asked about an example of who might benefit from this, Melissa mentioned a gentleman whose wife was having surgery and could not care for her husband until she fully recovered. At first she placed him in respite for one

month, then extended this to two months. Another respite client is coming to stay with them for six days.

To access this respite, in addition to the diagnosis, the facility requires a physician's orders, a medical history and physical, and a pre-assessment from VVV's registered nurse. This is basically the same procedure as for a permanent resident. The staff needs about one week advance notice for placement, and availability does fluctuate. If it's an emergency situation, such as a primary caregiver being placed in the hospital, it could happen more quickly. The cost of this respite is \$250 per day for 24 hour care and all the provided services.

There are additional benefits as well. Both the care receiver and the caregiver can test out this placement to see if they're both ready for this transition. It also allows the resident to become familiar with and comfortable at the Village should they need to reside outside of their home in the future. In addition, it gives the resident and the staff a chance to become better acquainted with one another.

Caregiving just got a helping hand in Ashland with this much-needed overnight respite service. Call Melissa for more information, and caregivers, please take care of yourselves. As they say on their respite program flyer, "An empty lantern provides no light."