

Track 6: Role of the Caregiver

[Narrator]

A cancer diagnosis affects the whole family and it is important to talk about the stress and special problems of your family members.

If you are helping someone you love get through cancer treatment, you are a caregiver. A caregiver can be a family member or a friend. Caregiving can be many different activities. Helping with daily activities, personal care, coordinating care and services, and giving emotional and spiritual support are just a few of the ways you can give care.

What comes naturally for most of us is to put our own feelings and needs on hold and to focus on the person with cancer. This may work for a short time, but it can be hard to keep this up for a long time. It can be hard on you, and it can be hard for your loved one with cancer.

[Kaya]

My name's Kaya. My husband Sam and I were in to see his doctor for follow up and treatment planning. We were discussing his chemo scheduled for the next week and my husband laughingly said, "I guess I'm ready to turn everything over to Kaya for the next month. She has a hard time letting me do anything because I get so tired. I wish she could let me push myself to do some things. I wouldn't feel like such a big lump." Well, I laughed along with him, and was a little upset. Our social worker at the treatment center noticed this and said that several other women were having some coffee in an adjacent room while their partners got chemo. She suggested I join them. That it might help to talk to other caregivers.

One of the people there was a woman named Susan. We quickly learned we had a lot in common.

Susan helped me to not feel all alone. Once a week I was able to talk to her and others who truly understood how I felt because they were in that same place. We talked about our feelings. We

traded stories and advice. We were there for each other. And when I'm struggling, I give Susan a call. It helps me get through some hard times.

[Narrator]

Taking care of yourself as the caregiver can help you be a better caregiver. A few ideas for taking care of yourself include:

- Give yourself an outlet for your own thoughts and feelings.
- Find comfort, think about what makes you feel happy or relaxed and do it.
- Join a support group or find a "buddy" who is going through a similar situation.
- Talk to a counselor.
- Find time to share special moments with your loved ones.
- Look for positive moments in every day.
- Laugh.
- Be grateful.
- Write in a journal.
- Do your regular activities as much as possible.
- Learn as much as you can about your loved one's medical condition. Knowledge increases understanding.
- Listen to the "Caring for the Caregiver" program of the *Cancer Survival Toolbox*[®].

[Kaya]

One thing Susan did that helped was to ask each week if I had done something to take care of myself. Susan helped me think about myself while still focusing on the most important person in my life, my husband.

[Narrator]

As a caregiver try to remember to care for yourself while giving care and support to your loved one. Your loved one will appreciate what you are doing. It will provide a balance to your relationship that will help keep that relationship strong, especially during this difficult time in your lives.

[Kaya]

Caregiving means that we also have to be successful problem solvers. Susan had learned a five-step approach to problem solving that she shared. The steps are:

- Identify and define the problem
- Gather information
- Plan your action
- Carry out your plan
- Evaluate your plan and make necessary changes

Susan and I worked together on the fatigue problem because both our husbands had it during treatment. We used the steps with our husbands and came up with ideas that really helped. One idea for my husband was including a nap in his day. He had never been much of a nap taker, but once we tried it, we were really happy. So it helped me to look at caregiving as problem solving. It was a positive approach for both me and my husband.