

Track 7: 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. Every situation is different. Care giving can be many different activities. Again, this depends on the situation and the need. 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.

Stephanie

I am Stephanie. My husband Sam and I were in to see his doctor for follow-up and treatment planning. We were talking about his treatments that are scheduled for the next few weeks and my husband laughingly said, "I guess I'm ready to turn everything over to Stephanie for the next month or so. 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 think I wouldn't feel like such a big lump."

Well, I laughed along with him, but it got me to thinking and a little upset. The social worker at the treatment center noticed this and said that several other women were having some coffee in the room next door, while their partners got chemo. She suggested I join them. She said it might help me to talk to others who were also caregivers.

One of the people there was Susan. We quickly learned we had a lot in common. Our husbands were both being treated for CLL. We both struggled between hovering over their every need

and backing off and not saying anything when they pushed themselves to go to work or to get out in the yard. We can see how tired they get, but didn't want to take away from them feeling they were doing what needs to be done at work or home.

Susan helps me to not feel all alone. I am able to talk to someone who truly understands how I feel because we are in that same place. We talk about our feelings. We trade stories and advice. We are 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. Taking care of yourself is important in giving you the strength you need to do what needs to be done. A few ideas for taking care of yourself include:

- Give yourself an outlet for your 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 for 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*[®].

Stephanie

Susan and I thought you might want to know what we found helpful. One thing that she did that helped was to ask me each week when we were together if I had done something to take care of myself that past week. Susan encouraged me to 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. Many caregivers find the experience changes them. Each is affected in a unique way. Each has shown great courage in meeting the needs of their loved one and providing the support and comfort that only they can provide.

Stephanie

Care giving means that we also have to be successful problem solvers. Susan had learned a five-step approach to problem solving. I have tried it and the steps helped me to find a better way to care for my husband when he was dealing with a lot of fatigue. 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 work together on the fatigue problem because both our husbands have it when their counts are low. We use the steps with our husbands and came up with some great ideas that really seem to help. One action idea for my husband was including

a nap in his day. He had never been much of a nap taker before, but once we tried it, we found it helpful. We nap together for a short time — like a power nap, and it gives both of us the energy to complete some things during the day that we might have had to miss. I suggest looking at care giving as problem solving. It is a positive approach for both me and my husband.