

UK Elder Care

## *IN THE KNOW*

E-Newsletter  
March 2009



### A MESSAGE FROM THE COORDINATOR

I would like to encourage employees using elder care services and participating in our CARE Group meetings to take an on-line confidential survey we will soon be disseminating on our list-serves. We have two surveys in which we want your input. The first one is for CARE Group participants, so we can get feedback and information about your participation in support group meetings. The other survey is a general one about the Elder Care services. We really appreciate your input and time in completing these surveys for us, and will use your input to plan for changes in our programs. Thank you in advance for your time and participation!



### NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

#### **Link Between Heart Failure And Cognitive Impairment**

Nearly half of patients with heart failure (HF) have problems with memory and other aspects of cognitive functioning, reports a new study published by Elsevier, in the February issue of *Journal of Cardiac Failure*.

Memory problems and other cognitive deficits may be an important factor to consider in planning medical care for patients with HF, according to the new study, led by Mary Jane Sauvé, D.N.Sc., R.N., of the University of California, Davis.

The researchers administered tests of cognitive (intellectual) function to 50 patients with HF and 50 people without HF, matched for age and estimated intelligence. Most of the patients had mild to moderate HF. Overall, patients with HF scored lower than controls on 14 of 19 cognitive tests. Forty-six percent of the HF patients were rated as having mild to severe cognitive impairment, compared to a 16 percent rate of mild impairment in controls. Memory problems, especially short-term memory, were the most common type of cognitive deficit.

With adjustment for other factors, the risk of cognitive impairment was more than four times higher in the HF group. The rate, types, and severity of cognitive impairment in this group of patients living with HF were similar to those seen in patients with end-stage HF

awaiting heart transplantation.

Changes in cognitive function have long been recognized in patients with heart disease. Although past reports have noticed an increased rate of cognitive impairment among people with HF, this has been assumed to reflect the age-related risk of cognitive decline.

These findings may have important implications for the care of patients with HF, Dr. Sauvé and colleagues believe. For example, "Care instructions and medication or dietary changes need to be written and given verbally because of patient difficulties with information requiring attention, learning, and memory functions."

"This is a very important article dealing with a neglected area of research," commented Barry M. Massie, M.D., Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Cardiac Failure*. "The authors have performed a well-designed study assessing heart failure patients for cognitive impairment, which was significant in a substantial proportion of patients. Furthermore, it was closely related to the severity of symptoms or left ventricular dysfunction. Clinicians should be aware of this problem, as it has the potential to interfere with optimal patient management."

Source: Medical News Today

## **80% Of Caregivers Report Strain On Their Marriages**

Eighty percent of baby boomers caring for an aging parent say that it has put a strain on their marriage. This insight is one of many garnered from a new research study conducted by <http://www.caring.com> to measure the impact of caregiving on spousal relationships.

### **The Caring.com study of baby boomers caring for aging parents uncovered the following:**

- 80% of baby boomers reported strains on their relationships.
- 46% of baby boomers stated that caregiving damaged their romantic relationships.
- 25% of divorced baby boomers said caregiving played a major role in their divorce.
- Baby boomers who are working full-time, are providing financial assistance to aging parents, and/or have aging parents living with them are at the greatest risk of marital strain.

The new insights on how stress affects marriage among caregivers have also been used to develop resources for those caring for an aging parent, including how to detect signs of stress in their marriages, as well as marriage tips to help caregiving couples make it work. The new content is supported by the "marriage doctors," Drs. Charles and Elizabeth Schmitz, authors of the award-winning book *Golden Anniversaries: The Seven Secrets of Successful Marriage*.

"Raising children is a challenge, but caring for aging parents can be an even greater challenge," said Dr. Elizabeth Schmitz. "The time spent caring for an aging parent can take a serious toll on the caregiver's relationship with their spouse. By providing relationship tips and pointing out warning signs, Caring.com is helping to nurture caregivers in a meaningful way by helping them keep their relationships strong."

Drs. Charles and Elizabeth Schmitz have worked with married couples for more than 25 years and have interviewed thousands of couples around the world to discover the secrets of successful marriages and to understand how to keep love alive during challenging times. With Valentine's Day right around the corner, Caring.com is working with the "marriage doctors" to offer helpful tips on how to infuse a little nurturing and romance back into a relationship.

"Our study of successfully married couples over more than two decades reveals that caring for aging parents is yet another challenge they are capable of dealing with, because the strength of their relationship carries them through the good times and the bad," said Dr. Charles Schmitz.

**Following are some helpful tips from the "marriage doctors" for coping with the challenges of caring for aging parents while maintaining and strengthening your marriage:**

1. Talk openly with each other about feelings, emotions, and stresses as they relate to your care of aging parents.
2. Make a concerted effort every day to keep the flame of your love affair with each other alive.
3. Approach all financial challenges with teamwork and open communication.
4. Don't blame each other when things get tough, since casting blame never solved a problem.
5. Don't wallow in self-pity; it's a wasted emotion.
6. Enhance your love relationship by providing each other occasional time for privacy and solitude.
7. Remember that the simple things matter in marriage, and they need to be practiced each day.

"The relationship between husband and wife trumps everything else. If they continue to strengthen their relationship with each other, their marriage will survive the enormous challenges associated with caring for aging parents," said Dr. Charles Schmitz.

Caregivers can find marriage tips, information on how stress affects marriage, or to chat with other caregivers about their caregiving journey on [www.caregiving.com](http://www.caregiving.com)



## UPCOMING EVENTS ON CAMPUS & IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Work-Life Spring Lunch & Learn Series: Goal Setting and Saving Options** at Scovell Hall, Rm. 220 March 3<sup>rd</sup>; **Understanding Life Insurance** at Scovell Hall, Rm. 220 March 19<sup>th</sup>; **Understanding Gifted Education** at Chandler Hospital, H31B March 13<sup>th</sup>; **Homework Help Workshop** at Scovell Hall, Rm. 220 March 26<sup>th</sup>. All sessions are from 12:10-12:50 p.m.
- **Health & Wellness Events:** Spring Lunch N Learn session: **Take Action: Decoding Food Labels** March 4<sup>th</sup> at WT Young Library, Gallery Room & March 11<sup>th</sup> at 405 CTW from 12:10 -12:50 p.m. For more information and to RSVP for appointments and programs, please visit [www.uky.edu/HR/wellness](http://www.uky.edu/HR/wellness).
- **Caregivers Support Group (CARE Group):** UK employee caregivers will meet March 12<sup>th</sup> from 12 – 1:00 in Room 322 CTW Building. Anyone is welcome! For more information, call Janice Austin at 323-4600.
- **7<sup>th</sup> Annual Bluegrass Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference:** Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> 8 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn North in Lexington. This conference is for grandparents/relatives and professionals, and includes a variety of workshops on legal, financial, mental health and parenting topics. Registration fee is \$5.00 for grandparents/relatives and \$30.00 for professionals. Call UK Elder Care a registration form, or call 257-5582 for more information.
- **African Americans & Alzheimer's Disease:** A one-day conference on the topic of African Americans & Alzheimer's Disease scheduled March 22<sup>nd</sup> 3 – 6 p.m. at the Sheraton Suites. Fellowship, food and information will be provided. For more information call Roberta Davis at 323-6316.
- **Learn about Alzheimer's Disease and the Latest Research** Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> from 1-2 p.m. at Barnes and Nobles Booksellers. Dr. Gregory Jicha from UK Sanders-Brown Center on Aging is guest speaker sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association. For more information, call 1-800-272-3900.



## CAREGIVER SURVIVAL GUIDE

### **Eight Tips to Managing Caregiver Guilt**

Guilt is a common feeling in the landscape of caregiving. Guilt can propel you to be the best you can be...or it can immobilize you.

For caregivers, painful feelings — such as guilt, sadness and anger — are like any

other pain. It's your body's way of saying, "Pay attention." Just as the pain of a burned finger pulls your hand from the stove, so, too, guilt guides your actions and optimizes your health.

You have a picture of the "Ideal You" with values you hold and how you relate to yourself and others. Guilt often arises when there's a mismatch between your day-to-day choices and the choices the "Ideal You" would have made. The "Ideal You" may be a parent who attends all of the kids' soccer games. Miss a game to take your dad to the doctor, and you think you're falling short.

You may have needs out of line with this "Ideal You." You may believe that your own needs are insignificant, compared to the needs of your sick loved one. You then feel guilty when you even recognize your needs, much less act upon them. A mother may ask herself, "How can I go out for a walk with my kids when my mother is at home in pain?" (A hint for this mother: she can give more to her mother with an open heart when she takes good care of herself.)

You may have feelings misaligned with the "Ideal You." Feeling angry about the injustice of your loved one's illness? You might even feel angry at your loved one for getting sick! Recognizing those feelings can produce a healthy dose of guilt. Yes, you may even feel guilty about feeling guilty.

"Why did my loved one get sick?" you may ask. Perhaps, if the "Ideal You" acted more often, your loved one would be healthy. What if you served more healthful meals? What if you called 911, instead of believing your husband when he said his chest pain was just "a little heartburn"?

If you're the kind of person prone to guilt, learn to manage guilt so that guilt serves you rather than imprisons you. Here are eight tips for managing your caregiver guilt:

Recognize the feeling of guilt : Unrecognized guilt eats at your soul. Name it; look at the monster under the bed.

Identify other feelings : Often, there are feelings under the feeling of guilt. Name those, too. For example, say to yourself: "I hate to admit this to myself, but I'm resentful that Dad's illness changed all of our lives." Once you put it into words, you will have a new perspective. You will also be reminding yourself of how fortunate you are to have what it takes to take care of loved one."

Be compassionate with yourself : Cloudy moods, like cloudy days, come and go. There's no one way a caregiver should feel. When you give yourself permission to have any feeling, and recognize that your feelings don't control your actions, your guilt will subside.

Look for the cause of the guilt : What is the mismatch between this "Ideal You" and the real you? Do you have an unmet need? Do you need to change your actions so that they align with your values?

Take action : Meet your needs. Needs are not bad or good; they just are. If you need some time alone, find someone to be with your loved one.

Change your behavior to fit your values: For example, Clara felt guilty because her friend was in the hospital and she didn't send a card. Her guilt propelled her to buy some beautiful blank cards to make it easier for her to drop a note the next time.

Ask for help : Call a friend and say, "I'm going through a hard time. Do you have a few minutes just to listen?" Have a family meeting and say, "Our lives have been a lot different since grandma got sick. I'm spending more time with her. Let's figure out together how we'll get everything done."

Revisit and reinvent the "Ideal You" : You made the best choices based on your resources and knowledge at the time. As you look to the future, you can create a refined vision of the "Ideal You." What legacy do you want to leave? What values do you hold dear? Then, when you wake up in the morning and put on your clothes, imagine dressing the "Ideal You." Let this reinvented "Ideal You" make those moment-to-moment choices that create your legacy.

Understand that you will be a more effective caregiver when you care for the caregiver first. Loved ones neither want nor expect selfless servants. As a caregiver, when you care for yourself, you increase and improve your own caring. Yes, guilt is part of caregiving, but this guilt can help you become the caregiver you and your loved one want you to be.

Source: Dr. Vicki; [www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com).



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