

Reality of Caring for a Loved One
Written by Amber Kilpatrick, Director of Summit
Hocking Valley Community Hospital

Growing older one rarely thinks or looks forward to the day they will be the caregiver of a parent or spouse. However, this happens to more people than you would consider and doesn't come without stress. Physical, mental, emotional, and financial stressors all are part of caring for an older adult with Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's is one of the many types of Dementia. An older adult may be affected by Alzheimer's (aka Senile Dementia), Vascular, Lewy Body, Frontal Lobe, or perhaps another type of Dementia that influences their everyday functioning. However, this is a terrible disease that not only affects the person suffering but has an impact that reaches all of those surrounding.

Caregivers do not forget to take care of your self. Remember no one is at fault for this disease, including you. There are many times I am face to face with a family member of someone with Dementia and they are in tears because they just can't do 'it' anymore. 'It' refers to keeping their loved one at home and being the sole caregiver of that person, even though this is a job that takes a village. 'It' involves changing their whole life by staying up throughout the night to ensure safety, watching their loved one 24/7, providing personal care, or possibly fearing for their own safety. This type of hands-on interaction takes high amounts of energy because there are so many elements to caring for a person who has lost insight, inhibition, memory, and comprehension.

Remember that you too, are important and if you turn to help it doesn't mean you care or love less. There are support groups available and resources in your community and online to seek help. Take care of yourself, otherwise you will not be there physically or emotionally to help.

Most importantly, research is top priority for insight in regards to the illness and investigating the planning required. It is essential for those in the early stages of Dementia to plan for what the future holds with their primary support person involved. Make sure your planning includes assets, facilities, physicians, and paperwork among other things. A key recommendation would be contacting an attorney that specializes in Elder Law to ensure all assets are planned for and appropriate paperwork is filled. Investigate Health Care Power of Attorney, Financial Power of Attorney, and/or Durable Power of Attorney. Set-up care with a neurologist or psychiatrist to monitor and manage Dementia related medication regimens. Budget finances in order to assess ability to pay for the different stages of care as they come, or perhaps if unable to pay then research alternatives.

Keep in mind you are not alone and there are people out there who are able, willing, and want to help!