

National Family Caregiver Month

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C

Did you know that November is National Family Caregiver month? It is this month that has been designated each year to thank, support and honor the more than 50 million family caregivers across the country who currently provide an estimated \$306 billion in “free” caregiving services. In NJ alone there are more than 800,000 “informal” (unpaid) caregivers. Chances are you many be one of the many who is providing this support for a loved one.

NJ sponsored the first state Caregivers Summit in June, addressing the specific needs of the Caregiver, and acknowledging the significant role caregivers play in this state. How appropriate that it is Thanksgiving this week, a time to give thanks and to recognize the love, honor and sacrifices of the family caregiver.

It takes a special someone to be a caregiver. And not everyone is capable, or does it well. Most often, one person alone carries most of the responsibility and burden. It is rare that the primary caregiver’s expectations of other family members providing an equal share in the time and work required occurs. Unfortunately, it frequently remains true that “one mother can take care of 10 children, but 10 children can not take care of one parent.” Assistance and relief expected from siblings and other extended family members is not always possible due to different life styles, work commitments and actual geography.

Sometimes, caregiver responsibilities can become too challenging. It is important to ask for help or seek professional guidance. Professional Care Managers can offer assistance on issues such as mental health, financial planning, government applications, guardianship and the law.

Caregivers play a significant role in the health care delivery system. The time has come to acknowledge the influence we do play in providing for the care and advocacy of our loved ones. Only by being educated consumers and remembering our need to care for ourselves as well, will we be best able to continue to be effective caregivers.

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