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Who Cares for the Caregiver: Primary Care Practice Fact Sheet #1

Eastern Agency on Aging

University of Maine Center on Aging

Aroostook Area Agency on Aging

Senior Spectrum

Rosscare

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Family Caregivers Profiled

America's stealth weapon against chronic illness is a 46-year-old woman with a family, a high-school degree, a full-time job and a household income of \$35,000. She has no particular training in health care. And to tell you the truth, sometimes she doesn't feel that great herself.

An estimated 15 to 25 million adults in the United States currently provide informal care (i.e., unpaid care) to relatives and friends.

Recognition of informal caregivers' contributions was heightened recently by estimates that project the economic value of their services to be \$196 billion, a figure that far exceeds national spending for home health care and nursing home care.

With ongoing public and private-sector efforts to limit post-acute and long-term care payments, the health care system's reliance on family caregivers will inevitably intensify.

Vulnerable caregivers not only have the responsibility and challenges of providing care to family members; they are also trusted companions, surrogate decision makers, and patient advocates.

Although informal care can positively affect the physical and psychological well-being of care recipients, its provision often comes at a personal cost to the caregiver. Studies have shown that caregiving can adversely influence the caregiver's physical and psychological health.

Factors that predispose family caregivers to poor outcomes and increased vulnerability include advanced age, the demands of employment, and inadequate social supports. Many vulnerable caretakers meet the demands of caregiving while coping with their own deteriorating health.

Caregivers are often the "invisible patients." Their own health care and other needs are often overlooked.

PRIMARY CARE PRACTICE TIPS

- **Ask about the "invisible patient." At every visit, check with both the patient and the "invisible patient."**
- **Be an advocate for respite and well care, and for swift attention to any health problems caregivers have.**
- **Make sure the caregiver knows how to do what is necessary to care for the patient, and that the caregiver is able to do it.**

For more info call your Area Agency on Aging
1-877-353-3771