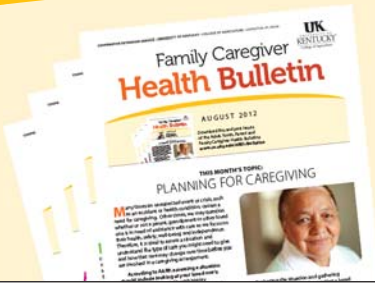


Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



NOVEMBER 2012

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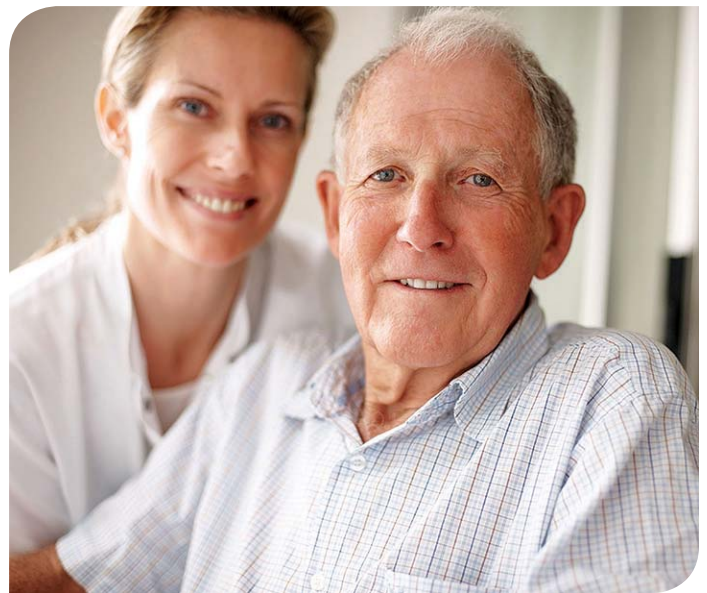
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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: THE JOYS OF CAREGIVING

Caregiving publicity often reinforces the stresses and burdens that accompany the job. There is no doubt that caregiving can be confusing, frustrating, stressful and exhausting. It can cause fatigue, isolation, depression and put us at risk for many health conditions, but it can also be a satisfying, joyful and rewarding experience. Caregiving provides new challenges and learning opportunities, in addition to quality time that lends to building or strengthening relationships with someone you care about. This bulletin highlights the joys of caregiving.

Caregiving can bring you closer. For some, caregiving provides an opportunity to spend quality time with someone you care about. Regardless of your past relationship, caregiving can provide a clean slate and a new perspective for each of you, resulting in new or a different sense of respect, admiration, and understanding. Caregiving can also bring you closer to other family members, who might also be a part of the caregiving team.

Caregiving leads to quality time. A caregiving relationship is a good reminder to slow down and



take advantage of today with the person you care about. This may include intimate conversations, laughing, reminiscing, sitting, hand-holding, reading or watching TV together.

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Caregiving connects you to family history.

Talking about the past can bring new understanding to the events and choices that helped shape the person you care for, in addition to you and your family. Reminiscing can be fun, insightful, emotional and therapeutic, especially when you sort through and organize old photos, letters, journals, family trees and life stories.

Caregiving can help you get organized.

Despite the stresses of caregiving, it helps you realize that you may be more competent than you thought. Caregiving helps you strengthen multi-tasking skills.

Caregiving helps you become more flexible.

The person you care for may be losing his or her ability to function and cope. Such variability in day to day decline forces you to be flexible and to adapt to your loved one's changes. If a favorite pastime, such as going to the movies, becomes too difficult, then watch movies on the television instead. If a favorite food is suddenly unappealing, adjust the menu. By relaxing your standards and adjusting to changes, you can better celebrate abilities and time together.

Caregiving heightens awareness about your own values, future wishes and even mortality.

Caregiving can be very spiritual, especially as you talk about and experience quality of life and even end-of-life issues. You may find yourself thinking about your own needs, wishes and beliefs. You may feel motivated to make your own arrangements such as identifying medical or durable powers of attorney, completing advanced directives, documenting end-of-life wishes or pre-planning your funeral.

Caregiving makes you think about your own support system. When helping someone in need, you begin to think about who can help you in a time of need.

Caregiving can generate empathy, compassion and love. Putting yourself into the shoes of someone you care for encourages you to provide care as you would want care provided to you. You may think that you don't have the patience or the personality to do it, but you do. It may be out of love, kindness, and/or obligation, but the responsibility and need for

caregiving helps you recognize your own strengths and abilities and helps you rise to the challenge.

Caregiving can make you laugh. Learning to take yourself lightly and to laugh at yourself and your situation, including your mistakes, helps you realize that you can't control the world around you, but you can control your inner reality and perceptions. Laughter can help clear your head and allows you to look at a situation from a new angle. Most importantly, when you laugh, you are relieving feelings of stress and anxiety not only for yourself, but for your loved one, as they see that things are going to be okay.

Caregiving can boost your sense of self-worth.

At the end of an exhausting day, even at a point when you feel worn down, you may realize that you succeeded at providing care and respecting the dignity of someone who needs and deserves it. This can make you feel happy in your heart, in addition to feeling strong, worthy and proud of yourself. You may also be acting as a positive role model for other family members, especially children who are witnessing how satisfying it can be to take care of another person.

Finding joy in caregiving may come from many sources. From the look in someone's eyes as you tuck them into bed that says "thank you for all that you do." Or from words or actions that express love and appreciation. Perhaps the joy comes from knowing that when you leave the room—it is a bedroom in your home versus a room in a hospital or nursing home. But most of all, the joy in caregiving might just come from knowing that you did the best job that you possibly could and that leaves you with no room for regret.

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Health Bulletin

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