

Care giving and Choosing Your Attitude

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While the country braces for the reality of providing health care to almost 72 million adults, the impact on caregivers is coming to all publications. A study from the American Psychological Association's "Stress in America" survey, reported that Americans caring for chronically ill relatives stated they had higher levels of stress and a greater tendency to engage in unhealthy behaviors to alleviate stress such as, excess alcohol and sleeping pill use. Additionally, 55% of 1,226 adults in this nation, described feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities of medication management and fall prevention.

A case story is Felicia Hudson and her father, Alvin Hudson. Alvin has suffered three strokes, diagnosed with diabetes, kidney failure and renal disease. These conditions require a long list of medication and dialysis three times a week. Felicia confirmed that it was only a matter of days before Hudson became overwhelmed. "It was like, 'oh my, what did I get myself into?'" the 51-year-old Georgia native recalls. "Sometimes, I would just go into the bathroom and cry". But, she uses a quote she has on her wall, "*Circumstances do not cause anger, nervousness, worry or depression ... it is how we handle situations that allow these adverse moods,*" it says. She continued, "We actually choose our own attitudes. I choose to be calm, well-adjusted and happy!"

It's a scenario familiar to many across the United States as adult children become caregivers for aging and chronically ill loved ones. As the first of the baby boomers turned 65 in 2011, the number of Americans entering retirement age is expected to nearly double by 2030, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging.

While emphasizing results among caregivers, the survey also found that 22% of Americans reported "extreme stress" and 39% said their stress had increased over the past year. The report emphasizes the public health implications of high stress levels, with caregivers reporting greater rates of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and depression.

The same message applies to those who are stressed, without the added burden of being a caregiver, she said. Significant sources of stress among respondents included financial abilities (75%), workload (70%), the economy (67%) and personal relationships (58%), according to survey results. "People feel a lot of pressure, especially in this economy, to not complain or set limits for themselves. Suddenly, you can have a body reaction that is very negative, from extreme depression to heart attack or stroke," said Andrew Spanswick, chairman and CEO of KLEAN, a residential addiction treatment center in West Hollywood, California.

"Americans are chronically sleep-deprived and overworked, so most people could really benefit from taking time for themselves and figuring out a way to relax," he said. Even as work piled up around her, Felicia Hudson didn't complain. She'd lie awake at night worrying about finances. With the rest of her family across the country in Atlanta, she felt alone. She lost contact with friends, put on weight and began to neglect basic household chores amid the hustle of work and caring for her father.

Now, Hudson has enlisted help from PACE, A California Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) Plans. This program collects her father from home three times a week and takes him to their center, where he receives his medication and has lunch with other clients. The program also drives him to the dialysis center and returns him home. One night a week, someone from PACE comes to the home and cleans his room, changes his sheets and provides extras like a foot rub. For Felecia, this works. She has joined a gym to take off the extra caregiver weight; and now has the ability to focus on her job.

There are PACE programs in other states such as, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Virginia. Virginia developed a pre-PACE program in the Hampton Roads areas to provide services to frail older citizens. Sentara Senior Community Care (SSCC), Virginia's only pre-PACE program, has served more than 475 older citizens, providing them with needed services to keep them safe in their homes and communities. As the pilot or pre-PACE program has completed, seven PACE programs are operational in the following areas: Virginia Beach, Hampton, Richmond City, Lynchburg, Big Stone Gap, Cedar Bluff and Northern Virginia. You can now reach them for evaluation at <http://www.easyaccess.virginia.gov/pace.shtml> or toll free at, 1-800-552-3402.