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## **Celebrating Our Family Caregivers**

November is National Family Caregiver's Month. If you are a caregiver to a loved one, let this article be our commendation of your wonderful efforts and our encouragement to you to begin November by caring also for yourself.

Most family members who help their older loved ones don't see themselves as caregivers. Yet a caregiver is anyone who helps an older person with household chores, errands, personal care, or finances. Most caregivers also don't realize that caring for themselves is an important part of providing care for someone else. Among all the hardships of providing care to another, a caregiver faces time restraints and stresses that might be physical and/or psychological in nature. Particularly today, given the current economy, a caregiver may also feel the burden of financial stress. The simple truth is you can't be a good caregiver if you don't take care of yourself. The following good advice comes from the book entitled *The Virginia Nursing Home Survival Guide*, by Virginia elder law attorney Evan Farr.

### **What You Can Do**

Take charge of your life. Don't let your loved one's illness or disability always take center stage. While you might fall into a care-giving role because of an unexpected event, somewhere along the line you need to step back and consciously say "I choose to take on this care-giving role." It goes a long way toward eliminating the feeling of being a victim.

Set realistic goals. Care-giving creates many conflicting demands on your time; it is vital to set realistic goals. Recognize what you can and cannot do. Define your priorities and stick to them as much as you can. You have the right to set limits and, though it is hard, it is okay to say no.

Seek out help from family and friends. When others offer assistance, accept it and suggest specific things they can do. Some caregivers see asking for help as a sign of weakness, failure or inadequacy, when in fact it is just the opposite. Reaching out for assistance before you are beyond your limits is one characteristic of a strong person. While they might not be comfortable helping with bathing and dressing needs, friends and family can help by running errands, shopping for groceries, preparing meals or just visiting. They can call regularly, taking some pressure off you to be the primary social outlet.

Seek out appropriate geriatric medical professionals. A geriatrician is a medical doctor who is specially trained to prevent and manage the unique health concerns of older adults. Older persons may react to illness and disease differently than younger adults. Geriatricians are able to treat older patients, manage multiple disease symptoms, and develop care plans that address the special health care needs of older adults. Geriatricians are typically primary care physicians who are board-certified in either Family Practice or Internal Medicine and have also acquired the additional training necessary to obtain the Certificate of Added Qualifications in Geriatric Medicine.

A Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) is a professional from the health-care background who provides personalized, client-centered services designed to assure the greatest independence and quality of care for clients with disabilities and their families. A GCM can assist a family by conducting personal assessments to identify client health and financial needs, conducting home and nursing facility assessments to find and maintain a healthy living environment and resources to meet these needs, and assisting family caregivers in finding needed services and resources and by monitoring the care for the client with chronic health problems. The Elder Law Group of Frascogna Courtney, PLLC is proud to have on staff Leigh Leverette, BA, CMC, a Certified Care Manager and member of the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers ([www.caremanager.org](http://www.caremanager.org)) to help our clients with these vital services.

### **National Family Caregiver's Month**

The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA) provides education and support to those who are caring for a loved one. Founded in 1993, their motto is "Believe in Yourself, Protect Your Health, Reach Out for Help and Speak Up for Your Rights."

Richard Courtney and our Geriatric Care Manager, Leigh Leverette, are available to give free seminar presentations to caregiver groups and community groups on a variety of topics that will educate and empower caregivers and older adults for better care and higher quality of life. Call us at 601-987-3000 or toll-free at 866-ELDERLAW.