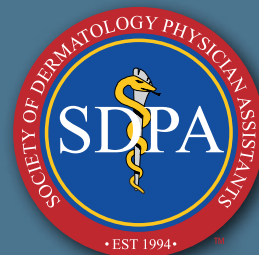


JDPA

Journal of Dermatology for Physician Assistants



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FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Caregiver Fatigue: How To Avoid Burning Out

By Mary Antonucci
Director of Advocacy & Volunteer Services
Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF)

The JDPA typically features articles written by patients with dermatological illnesses or skin conditions in this From the Patient's Perspective section. In past issues, we have also highlighted articles written by patient's caregivers. The article below covers the subject of avoiding burnout as a caregiver (and in particular for those caring for patients battling melanoma). We feel it is greatly valuable for our JDPA audience to read and share this information with patients and their respective caregivers.

Providing care to a sick loved one is a centuries-old act of kindness and loyalty. There is comfort in knowing that your loved one is receiving the best possible care and relationships are often strengthened by this new kind of intimacy. The benefits of caregiving are clear, but what about the toll it can take?

Caregiver Fatigue, or Caregiver Syndrome, as it's increasingly being referred to by the medical community, is a result of not asking for help and consistently sacrificing yourself and your needs for the benefit of others. Feeling extreme stress over extended periods of time affects your health, motivation, attitude and mood, as well as your ability to cope with your daily responsibilities. Caregivers in poor health cannot provide optimal care for someone else.

AVOIDING BURNOUT

Take a break - Does leaving your loved one's side make you nervous? Ask a trusted friend or family member to step in and take over for a few hours while you run errands or do something relaxing. Remember, you can't do everything by yourself.

Remember the fundamentals - Make sure you remember to eat and get enough sleep. Take short naps if you need to and talk to your healthcare provider if lack of sleep becomes a problem.

Establish healthy boundaries - Well-meaning friends and family members may overwhelm you with phone calls and emails. Don't feel guilty about not returning every call. Caring Bridge (www.caringbridge.org) is a free service that allows families to stay connected by providing free personalized patient websites. Updating your site and sharing the link is a great way to keep people informed.

Ask for help - Accepting help from others isn't always easy, but it's important to remember that letting others help you will also help your loved one. People want to help, but may not know how to offer it. Ask for what you need and for those things that would be most helpful to you. Lotsa Helping Hands (www.lotsahelpinghands.com) is a free service that provides families with an organized means of answering the question, "What can I do to help?"



The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is the largest independent organization devoted to melanoma. The MRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Committed to the support of medical research in finding effective treatments and eventually a cure for melanoma, the MRF also educates patients, caregivers, and physicians about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of melanoma. The MRF's website is the premier source for melanoma information seekers.

The MRF is also an active advocate for the melanoma community, helping to raise awareness of this disease and the need for a cure. Its online forum - the Melanoma Patients Information Page (MPIP) - is the oldest and largest community of people affected by melanoma and is hosted through the MRF. It is designed to provide support and information to caregivers, patients, family, and friends.


Melanoma Research Foundation
Contact Information: www.melanoma.org
1411 K Street, NW Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005
MRF Blog: www.melanoma.org/about-us/news-press-room/blog
Phone: (800) 673-1290

Share your feelings - You're probably experiencing a wide range of emotions right now. Give yourself a chance to understand and work through them. Confide in a close friend, a counselor or a support group. Lean on the MRF's Melanoma Patients Information Page (MPIP) community members. Rest assured, everything you are feeling right now is normal.

Avoid tunnel vision - Don't let caregiving take over your entire life. It's easier to accept a difficult situation if there are other things in your life you find rewarding. While it's important not to over-commit yourself, be sure to set-aside time for things that give you meaning and purpose.

Laugh - You might not feel like laughing right now, but having a good giggle can reduce stress hormones like cortisol. Watch a comedy or laugh with a friend over the absurdity of life.

Caregiving may be the hardest job you'll ever have. If you know the warning signs for burnout and can take steps to avoid it, caregiving may also be the most rewarding experience of your life.

For additional information on caregiving, download the Melanoma Research Foundation's Caregiver Support Guide, written for caregivers, by caregivers available at the MRF website (www.melanoma.org). 

CAREGIVER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

I have the right to take care of myself. This is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the ability to take better care of my loved one.

I have the right to seek help from others even though my loved one may object. I know the limits of my own endurance and strength.

I have the right to maintain parts of my own life that do not include the person I care for just as if (s)he was healthy. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can do for this person.

I have the right to do some things just for myself.

I have the right to get angry, be depressed and express difficult feelings once in a while.

I have the right to reject any attempt by my loved one to make me do things out of guilt or anger.

I have the right to get considerations, affection, forgiveness and acceptance for what I do for my loved one, as I offer these in return.

I have the right to take pride in what I'm doing. And I have the right to applaud the courage it has taken to meet the needs of my loved one.

I have the right to protect my individuality. I also have the right to a life that will sustain me when my loved one no longer needs my full-time help.

— Anonymous


Take Home Points for Derm PAs:

By Steven K. Shama, MD, MPH, FAAD

I would suggest that the readers check the link which leads to an article about Caregiver Fatigue (CF), defined as a debilitating condition brought on by unrelieved, constant caring for a person with a chronic illness, and associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and anger.

1. The first way of looking at the issue of CF is from the classic caregiver perspective, that is, from the perspective of the person who is caring for a loved one who has a chronic illness. It reminds me of the label compassion fatigue, the loss of compassion for the ill person after caring for someone long term. What a terrible feeling this must be to have, and what guilt the caregiver must be feeling. As clinicians, we must ask whether the caregiver may be suffering from CF and its associated pathology, including compassion fatigue and offer help.

2. Using a non-traditional definition of CF, I can see CF affecting the person suffering from the chronic illness. After months and years of caring for themselves (along with a separate caregiver) they might develop symptoms of CF. We must ask our patients about this.

3. I realize that we, as clinicians, are caregivers ourselves to our patients, and may suffer from CF. When we take care of someone, do we care "too much" about those patients who have a chronic condition? Might we get depressed, anxious, or angry when we see these patients? We need to recognize the syndrome in us and ask for the same help we recommend to others, for our own health and for the health of our patients. 

Dermatology Physician Assistants



Physician Assistants (PAs) in dermatology play a number of varied and vital roles.

PAs are medical providers licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. From patient care and education, to skin surgery, treatment of chronic skin conditions, and cosmetic procedures, PAs are dynamic members of the healthcare team. PAs practice in every medical and surgical specialty and have been collaborating with dermatologists for 30 years, providing a wide variety of services. These include diagnosing, prescribing medications, ordering and interpreting lab tests, wound suturing, and medical or surgical treatment of a wide variety of clinical diseases. As with all PAs, dermatology PAs are legally and ethically bound to practice only under physician supervision.

PAs are trained in intensive, accredited education programs.

Because of the close working relationship that PAs have with physicians, PAs are educated in the medical model designed to mirror and complement physician training. PAs take a national certification examination and to maintain their certification, they must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and take a recertification exam every six years. Graduation from an accredited PA program and passage of the national certifying exam are required for state licensure.

How a PA practices dermatology varies with training, experience, and state law. In addition, the scope of the PA's responsibilities corresponds to the supervising physician's scope of practice. In general, a PA will see many of the same types of patients as the physician. Referral to the physician, or close consultation between the PA and physician, is based on the dynamic relationship between the physician and PA.

The Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants (SDPA) is a non-profit professional organization, composed of members who provide dermatologic care or have an interest in the medical specialty of dermatology. Fellow members provide medical services under the supervision of a board certified dermatologist.

More information can be found at www.dermpa.org and www.aapa.org.

