

Supporting Unpaid Family Caregivers – A Critical Role for Pharmacists and Technicians

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

I have no conflicts of interest with ineligible companies to disclose.



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Learning Objectives

1. Describe the role and characteristics of informal family caregivers, including how they differ from formal caregiving providers.
2. Discuss the potential effects of caregiving on the physical, emotional, and financial well-being of family caregivers.
3. Examine common concerns of family caregivers and strategies to support them.



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Who is described as a caregiver ?

- A person who provides direct care (as for children, elderly people, or the chronically ill)
- **People at all stages of life can receive and provide care; Caregivers may be spouses, adult children, siblings, friends, neighbors or even young children**



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"Caregiver." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caregiver>. Accessed 10 Aug. 2026.

Formal Caregivers

- Usually associated with a service or system
- Can be paid
- Usually skilled
- May also be volunteers

Transportation
Meals on Wheels
Adult Day Programs
Home Health Care Aides
Physical Therapists



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Informal Caregivers

- Family, friends, neighbors, etc.
- Unpaid
- Usually unskilled
- All ages (children and teens can be caregivers)



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Q1: Quick Knowledge Check

Which of the following would be considered formal caregivers ?

- Registered nurse making home visits to patients recently discharged from the hospital
- The neighbor that picks up your medication from the pharmacy for your parents
- Teenage granddaughter of patient who helps with organizing pill box for her grandmother
- The adult son taking his mother to the doctor's office



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Q2: Quick Knowledge Check

Which of the following would be classified as an informal family caregiver?

- A Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) visiting a patient at home to demonstrate conditioning plan after surgery
- Joe - The regular driver for your neighbor's "Meals on Wheels"
- Mr. Jones who orders, picks up and administers medication for his wife (Correct answer)
- None of the above



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Quick Facts

1 in 5 adults are caregivers

Caregiving can be short or long

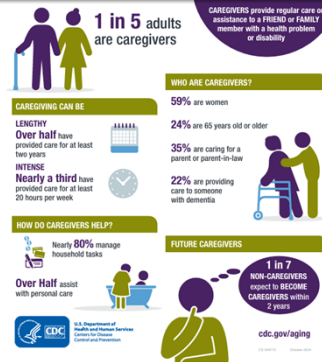
Over half help with personal care

Many are women

Almost a quarter care for someone with dementia

CAREGIVING

2021-2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Data from adults in 47 States and Puerto Rico



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Caregiver Burden

Caregiver burden is a multidimensional response to the **physical, psychological, emotional, social, and financial stressors** associated with caregiving.

Caregivers may experience:

- Physical and psychological symptoms
 - Depression, anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances, memory and concentration problems
- Neglect of their own health
 - Weakened immune system, increased risk of illness

Ogbonna KC, Delafuente JC. The Complicated Patient. In: Angaran DM, Whalen K, eds. Medication Therapy Management: A Comprehensive Approach. McGraw-Hill Education; 2015. Accessed August 14, 2026. <https://accesspharmacy.mhmedical.com>

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Caregiver Burden

- Greater caregiving demands—including **more assistance with ADLs/IADLs** and **more hours of care**—are associated with greater caregiver burden.
- Older adults caring for a spouse may be particularly vulnerable to adverse health outcomes
- **Leisure, vacations, and family time may diminish** as caregiving demands increase
- Burden may be particularly high for:
 - Spousal caregivers
 - Caregivers who live with the care recipient
 - Families caring for someone with progressive dementia

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Caregiving Has Consequences Beyond the Home

Caregiving responsibilities can affect **employment and income**

- Caregivers may:
 - Reduce their work hours
 - Experience limitations in career advancement
 - Add caregiving hours to an already full workweek
 - Lose employment because of caregiving demands

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Informal Caregivers and Medications – What happens away from the Pharmacy ?

- Pick up medications (possibly pay for medications)
- Make schedule to give medications
- Organize medications (e.g with pill box)
- Watch for adverse events
- Contact prescriber for refills
- Administer medications (e.g. enoxaparin)
- **May be managing their own medications and health conditions**
- Others ?



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Profile of an Informal Caregiver You May See in the Pharmacy



Mrs. Williams is a regular customer of your pharmacy.

She comes every month to pick up her husband's prescriptions

She's pleasant and always chats with you

You notice that she has been late picking up prescriptions for 2 months

Worries about prescription costs now

When comes to pick up the prescriptions you notice that she is unusually quiet, and she tells you her husband is now bedbound



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Do You See Signs of Caregiver Burden in Mrs. Williams ?

- Change in Usual Pattern of getting prescriptions (Doesn't pick up refills on time)
- Quieter than usual
- Admits husband is now bedbound
- In much more of a hurry, seems overwhelmed



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Red Flags for Caregiver Burden



- Frequent refill problems
- Unsure what medication is for
- Seems overwhelmed
- Rushing
- Others ?

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How can the pharmacy team help Mrs. Williams ?

Try to **converse in an empathetic, compassionate manner**

"I'm glad to see you" (Don't say "Where have you been?")
 "How have things been going for you and your husband ?"
 "I'm sorry that he is bed-bound. That must be challenging."
 "What concerns do you have about him being bedbound?"
 "Who helps you with his care?"
 "How can we help you in terms of his medications?"
 "How are you doing yourself?"

Be respectful- Some people will talk readily, others will not

Other Ideas ?



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Q4: Knowledge Check

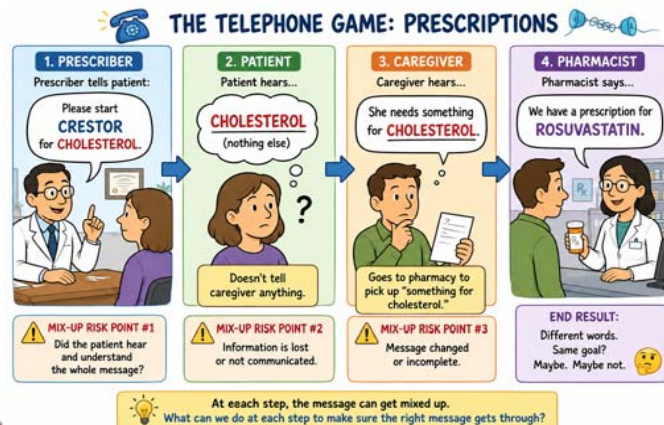
Which of the following are possible signs of burden a caregiver might share with the pharmacy staff ?

- A. Worry about finances (Co-pays are too high)
- B. Sleeping the same amount as they did before caregiving- Still feel rested
- C. Say he and his wife are going on a vacation
- D. None of the above



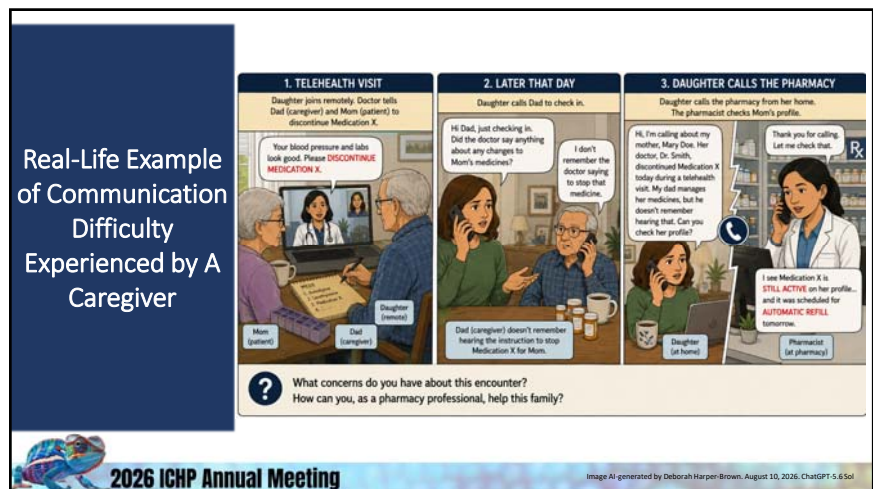
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Why Pharmacy Teams Matter to Caregivers

- Most caregivers manage medications for the person they are caring for, and medication regimens have become more complex
- Caregivers receive little (if any) training in medication management or basic disease state education
- Pharmacists are (still) among the most accessible healthcare professionals
- Pharmacists understand effects of over-the-counter drugs, natural products, dietary supplements, drug interactions
- Technicians may interact with patients more frequently, or gather patient histories



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Q5: Quick Knowledge Check

Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians can:

- Help caregivers understand medications
- Identify and prevent drug interactions
- Discuss proper administration of medications
- All of the above



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A Possible Pharmacy-based Service for Caregivers



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Using Humor, Compassion and Evidence: Innovative Ways to Support Informal Caregivers

“Graphic medicine is an innovative and interdisciplinary field that explores the intersection of comics and healthcare. The term was coined by Dr. Ian Williams, a physician and artist, in 2007 to describe the use of graphic novels and comics as a medium to convey medical information, share patient and caregiver experiences, and enhance understanding of health and illness.”

“By utilizing the visual and narrative power of comics, graphic medicine aims to improve health literacy, foster empathy, and provide an engaging, accessible way to discuss complex medical issues.

Graphic medicine: ill-conceived and well drawn
· www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/graphicmedicine/index.html. Accessed August 17, 2026.



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Summary

- Caregivers are an important part of the healthcare team
- Until recently, somewhat invisible
- More work is being done to support caregivers
- Because many of the caregivers help with medications, it is a perfect area of emphasis for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians



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What is one thing you can implement to help caregivers when you return to your pharmacy ?



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“There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers”

— Rosalynn Carter

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Rosalynn Carter, *Helping Yourself Help Others: A Book for Caregivers* (1994).



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Selected Resources to Share with Caregivers

Family Caregiver Alliance: <https://www.caregiver.org>

“[The]... **Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA)** has provided expert support, resources and guidance to family caregivers of adults with physical and cognitive impairments, such as Parkinson’s, stroke, Alzheimer’s and other types of dementia”

Support for Caregivers in IL: <https://ilaging.Illinois.gov/programs/caregiver.html>

Caregiver Action Network: <https://caregiveraction.org>

Website with sections for caregiving for individuals with various diseases.



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