



The Caregiver as Advocate

I was a caregiver for about a ten year period for a father and then a mother. Hardest job I ever had? Definitely. Rewarding? Not always. Exhausting? Almost always. Worthwhile? Without a doubt. I had been in the role of Caregiver Support Specialist during my personal caregiving days. I heard many stories from many caregivers. There are no two stories the exact same but there are many commonalities. There are no quick and easy solutions but there are approaches to this role that can make a positive difference.

Here's one thing that might help you in your journey as a caregiver, regardless of whom you are caring for.

Being an advocate for someone who is no longer able to care for themselves adequately can be the single most important role you play. It will empower you. By acting as an advocate you have committed to educating yourself about the disease, treatment, services, resources, medicines, just to name a few things. When you have the knowledge, you can ask the right questions, contact the appropriate resources, and stand up for your rights and the rights of your loved one. People will listen and really hear you when you have the knowledge and combine that with being open to learning more.

How does someone become an effective advocate? If you have never been in this role, it can be overwhelming. You feel solely responsible and guilty if you don't make what you want to be the "right" decisions. However, when you

NSES' Annual Meeting

Dr. Larry Minnix will be our guest speaker on Tuesday, March 21st at Boston Marriott Peabody. To register go to Events on our website at www.nselder.org.

Caregiver Resources:

Our Family Caregiver Specialists have identified concerns & questions that are commonly discussed in support groups and counseling sessions. Check our blog at www.nselder.org for our monthly Caregiver topic. We'll provide you with some resources & options for handling specific issues.

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make decisions on someone's behalf and you do it in the best interests of the person and you do it armed with all the information you can gather, then there is no "wrong" choice.

You can start being an advocate in very simple ways. Keep a recording of the people you speak with, the appointments you are part of, the medicines that are prescribed, changes in health or behaviors, and any other detail that you may need to refer back to. This can prove invaluable as you progress in the caregiving duties.

When someone offers you advice or information, accept it and incorporate it into your arsenal of knowledge. You do not need to be a medical professional to arm yourself with accurate information. If you encounter a situation that needs your intervention you may find it easier when you have records to refer back to. Even for the most reserved person, knowledge will help you find your voice with which to speak up. That is the gift you will give your loved one.

The energy you will spend on advocating will feed off of itself. You will find a purpose and it will propel you forward. You are engaged in this care and that's what will make the job worthwhile. It isn't just the person you are caring for, but your voice can help make changes for those you don't even know; those who have no one to advocate for them.

At the end of the day when you can say you have done all that was in your power, you will feel it was all worthwhile. The "fight" is never in vain. You will feel blessed that you were able to be present as an advocate.

If you want to learn more about being an effective caregiver, you can call North Shore Elder Services at 978-750-4540 and ask to speak with Kathy Perrella, Options Program Manager and Caregiver Specialist.

Here are some resources that may be of benefit;

<http://www.nextavenue.org/how-be-loving-advocate-your-parents/>

<https://www.care.com/c/stories/5589/how-to-communicate-with-your-parents-medical/>

<http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/info-10-2013/caregiving-doctor-visit-jacobs.html>

<https://nihseniorhealth.gov/talkingwithyourdoctor/askingquestions/01.html>

* North Shore Elder Services is now offering private pay case management. Check out more about Practical Matters at <http://nselder.org/practical-matters/> and stay tuned for more information.

Jayne Girodat, NSES

To read the blog in its entirety, go to www.nselder.org