



Keeping In Touch

Fall 2003

News For Family Caregivers

by Lynn Cibuzar, LSW, DARTS Service Coordinator

Caregiver Story Project Wants Your Story Too!

The National Family Caregivers

Association (NFCA)

has started the

"Family Caregiver Story Project"

and would welcome your stories.

Besides giving you a chance to share your story and openly express your feelings and concerns, you can find great solace in reading other caregivers' stories.



The NFCA hopes that by writing out a story and sharing it with others, a caregiver may get some of the support they need. As well, the "Story Project" stories will give caregivers a needed public voice. The NFCA will share caregivers' stories with those who can help make a difference—legislators, the media, and healthcare professionals.

You can participate by going to www.nfcacares.org. Currently, the NFCA isn't accepting handwritten letters. If you're interested in sharing your story, but don't have access to the Internet, call Lynn at DARTS, 651-234-2248.

Stay Aware So Caregiving Stresses Don't Hurt Your Health

It's no surprise that the stress of caring for a loved one with a serious illness can age you before your time. And now, a new study by Ohio State University's College of Medicine suggests how this can happen – through a chemical reaction that weakens the body's immune system and accelerates the aging process. During periods of stress, so-called "stress" hormones are released that trigger a cascade of physiologic changes. One is increased production of interleukin-6 (IL-6), an inflammatory chemical that has been linked to increased risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis, and other conditions often associated with aging.

Researchers report that study participants who cared for an Alzheimer's patient typically had blood levels of IL-6 four times as high as those who were not caregivers – despite being otherwise similar in age, lifestyle, and income bracket. What's more, these IL-6 levels in the caregivers remained high for up to three years – even after their loved ones had died.



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National Family Caregivers Month
November 2003

This study helps explain previous findings that caregivers typically suffer from impaired immunity, and therefore may be more vulnerable to various serious health problems compared with those under less stress. But it also suggests how quickly this type of major stress can age a caregiver.

People don't usually have the highest levels of IL-6 in the blood until they're about 90, but in this study, they found such high levels in caregivers who were around age 75. Other factors that increase production of IL-6 include obesity, smoking, and poor sleep. Conversely, regular exercise can decrease IL-6 levels.

Here are some points from *Share the Care Family Caregiver Journal* to help you with caregiving stresses:

- ✓ Are you seeking information about your loved one's disease or condition?
- ✓ Have you created a circle of support by maintaining family relationships and friendships?
- ✓ Do you set realistic goals?
- ✓ Do you share with family and friends and invite them to help you give care?
- ✓ Are you using community resources?
- ✓ Are you taking breaks from your caregiving duties?
- ✓ Are you eating well and getting enough sleep?
- ✓ Do you relax each day?
- ✓ Have you laughed today?
- ✓ Have you counted your blessings?

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Remember that DARTS is here to support you and help you lessen the stresses, so you can uncover some positive benefits for yourself in this chapter of life. Please call your DARTS service coordinator or our information center at 651-455-1560 if you need some guidance.

may we help you?

DARTS can meet your program or education needs for seniors and caregivers

DARTS' educational programs can help a senior center, faith community, service club, housing facility, or senior service provider better serve seniors and their caregivers. Anyone wanting to stay on top of aging issues can benefit by scheduling an educational program offered by DARTS' Community Services.

DARTS' 16 program offerings fall into three categories – caregiver programs, senior programs, and overview programs – and allow a community group to schedule a program that best meets their needs. Program topics include *Community Resources, Financial and Legal Issues, Housing Decisions, Keeping Your Memory Strong, and Caregiving as a Family.*

To get more information about the 16 topics, program lengths, how to schedule, and variable fee, call Janie O'Connor at DARTS, 651-455-1560. To learn more about DARTS services in general, as well as volunteer opportunities, visit www.darts1.org.

*When you get to the end of
your rope, tie a knot and hang on.*

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

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www.nfcares.org



from the DARTS library

Comfort and Care for the Caregiver

Pat Samples is from the Twin Cities and is well known as an author and speaker on many things, including caregiving. She has spent her life supporting positive personal transformation for older adults, family caregivers, and others wanting to generate more vibrancy, creativity, and peace of mind in their lives. She has several books and a new CD in the DARTS caregiver library. The CD is a 30-minute inspiring and practical discussion about self-care and self-comforting. A three-step process helps you tap into your inner wisdom and find greater peace of mind. The CD ends with 15 minutes of soothing keyboard music for relaxing or meditating anytime.

Pat has two books in DARTS' library:

- Daily Comforts for Caregivers is a personal support system that offers you wisdom and affirmations for each day of the year. Written in the first person, each page of Daily Comforts takes you inside your own thoughts and helps you make the transition from distress to a peaceful and practical perspective on your problems.
- Self-Care for Caregivers: A Twelve Step Approach is a sane, practical approach to managing the stresses of caregiving through self-care and personal awareness. Using a plan – the twelve steps – you can deal with the emotional strain of caregiving and find peace of mind.

Call Alicia at 651-234-2245 to borrow Pat Samples' CD or books or any other materials in the library.

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, call DARTS at 651-455-1560 and ask to have your name removed from the Keeping In Touch mailing list.