



WHEN YOUR SPOUSE OR PARTNER IS DIAGNOSED WITH A SERIOUS CHRONIC ILLNESS OR DISABILITY – YOU BECOME A CAREGIVER.

You may experience shock, dismay, fear, anxiety, confusion.

You may deny the diagnosis ... or wonder what it means.

Either way – you have just become a WELL SPOUSE.

A CLUSTER OF PROBLEMS NOW AFFECT YOU, YOUR PARTNER, FAMILY MEMBERS AND OTHERS.

How to cope? There are no guidelines. No one is prepared.

Few people have the experience or training to know how to be a Well Spouse.

MYTHS AND REALITIES

MYTH: Your life will not change.

REALITY: Your life has already changed and will continue to do so.

MYTH: Your spouse, you and your family can handle all aspects of chronic illness without help from others.

REALITY: You need help! Chronic illness situations are more manageable if there is help from family, friends and appropriate health, social work and other professionals.

MYTH: Doctors have all the answers and are interested in every aspect of daily caregiving.

REALITY: Caregiving help is more likely to come from specific disease associations, social service agencies, visiting nurses, clergy and other allied health professionals.

MYTH: Your total dedication to your partner's care and the abdication of your own individuality, interests and needs are the most helpful things you can do.

REALITY: Enlightened self-interest, rest and recreational outlets are essential for maintaining your physical and mental health. Periodic relief from responsibility and pressure will help you to be a better caregiver.

WHERE TO START?

Crying helps to release feelings.

Talking helps to clarify the problems and enables you to learn from the experiences of others.

Denial, drinking, drugs and depression don't help!

LET'S GET REAL

Your responsibilities are growing.

Your home life is challenging.

Your challenge now is to cope, manage and survive in a new and uncertain situation.

ACTION STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Gather information about the illness from local and national resources.

Learn a new medical and caregiving vocabulary.

Familiarize yourself with medications, adaptive equipment, entitlements through Social Security, your insurance and Medicaid – whatever it takes.

Accept the fact that your responsibilities have grown and work on improving your problem-solving and crisis-management.

IT HELPS TO NETWORK WITH OTHERS WHO ARE IN THE SAME SITUATION

The Well Spouse® Association is a private, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to the emotional support and education of spousal caregivers of the chronically ill and disabled. Services include local support groups, letter writing groups, national and regional conferences, publications and Mainstay, a quarterly newsletter. Individual membership is \$30 a year. No well spouse is denied membership due to financial hardship. Call or write for information:

Well Spouse® Association

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When one is sick, two need help.