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Medical Diagnosis By Webcam?



Long-Term Family Caregivers Face A Marathon, Not A Sprint

Studies over the past decade suggest that caregivers run a different race than your typical marathon. To be sure, there are some caregivers who, because of conflicted emotions or overwhelming circumstances, quit the course early, placing their loved ones in nursing homes. But the research finds that the caregivers who hang in there and keep running for extended durations often become stronger and more resilient over time.

We might say that caregivers hit their stride or find a groove. Here are some ideas drawn from research and clinical lore to incorporate into your caregiving routine.

Learn The Terrain

Not all the diseases and conditions with which care recipients struggle pose the same challenges. To best prepare, caregivers need to know the trajectory of the illness affecting their family member. They also need to know the pertinent medical treatments and support services. Primary care physicians can help with information about particular conditions.

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Telemedicine is an increasingly common, but still controversial alternative to the traditional office-based visit; it can include anything from e-mailing your own doctor to video psychiatry appointments at rural clinics.

However, in recent years, the vastly improved quality and availability of video has expanded the business opportunity for more companies to offer patients the chance to virtually visit a doctor via phones, computers and tablets from anywhere.

Advocates say telemedicine has the potential to improve access to care, lower costs and provide reliable, specialized care to patients who need it. But some doctors and researchers question to what degree virtual care equates to in-person treatment, and whether these e-physicians might overprescribe drugs to keep patients satisfied, misdiagnose an ailment or miss a more serious medical problem entirely.

A Growing Trend

The American Telemedicine Association estimates that 1.25 million online patient consults will happen this year.

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What Our Clients Say About Us

“Entire encounter is pleasant and professional. We always appreciate Marcia’s help.”

-PG

Long-Term Family Caregivers Face A Marathon, Not A Sprint...*continued from page 1*

Practice And Hone Skills

Whether it is counting pills, calming agitated loved ones or mastering insurance forms, long-term family caregivers garner many diverse skills along the way. At the same time, they gain a growing sense of competence and confidence that they have the know-how to do this difficult job.

Run With The Pack And A Loud Cheering Section

Family caregivers can benefit from the company of others with similar experiences, for example, caregiver support group members, and from the encouragement of friends and family members who may not be directly involved in giving care.

Go The Distance With Purpose

Nothing energizes caregivers more than the conviction that they are making progress toward a vital goal of providing loving, effective care to an ailing family member for as long as necessary. Spiritual, religious and moral values often serve as animating forces. So does the desire to give back to others who previously cared for them. Many long-term caregivers have a mixture of relief and pride that they were able to care for a loved one. They go on with their lives as changed people, more sure of foot, mind and heart. †

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Increasingly, employers and insurers are including the services as part of benefits packages. A recent survey of 140 large employers by the National Business Group on Health found that 74 percent of the nation's largest employers are offering telemedicine services in 2016, up from 48 percent in 2015.

Virtual Risks?

Virtual visits are not without their detractors. A seemingly minor condition like a cough could signal a more serious condition. Seeing a virtual doctor could also lead to delays in treatment. "If someone is calling in with chest pain, instead of going right to the emergency department, that delay could have important implications for patient safety," says Lori Uscher-Pines, a researcher at the nonprofit research organization RAND.

Professional Groups Weigh In

The American Medical Association has kept the door open to prescribing through e-visits, stating that a doctor-patient relationship can be established either in person or "virtually through real-time audio and video technology." In a recent policy paper, the American College of Physicians adopted a similar stance, writing that a doctor and patient could meet for the first time using telemedicine, as long as appropriate treatment standards are followed.

While the virtual visits provide an option for minor medical problems, patients should avoid suggesting a self-diagnosis, as it may influence the doctor. A patient who blames shortness of breath on asthma, for example, may steer the doctor away from considering other possibilities, such as a heart condition. As with any appointment, patients need to make sure the doctor is attuned to their needs and symptoms. †