Being a Caregiver for Late-stage Dementia Patients

Personally caregiving for advanced Dementia patients is a great way to help ensure your loved one receives the care and supervision they need, but if you are new to the role it can be a daunting task. Caregivers who have a better understanding of Dementia and how it will affect their loved will be more equipped the emotional challenges that they are likely to encounter.

An Overview of Dementia

Many people do not understand that Dementia has different stages: early or mild, middle (moderate), and late (severe). Stages advance as the disease progresses, and there is no set amount of time that occurs between stages. Additionally, the general public is not always aware that there are several
different types of Dementia such as Vascular and Alzheimer’s disease which is arguably the most widely known. However the general rule that symptoms increase in severity as the disease progresses holds true across the board for all forms of Dementia.

Early Stages of Dementia

In the early stages of Dementia, a person may be completely unaware they have the disease, being asymptomatic (without symptoms). In many cases, individuals in the very early stages of Dementia may be able to function on their own and are can also work and be a part of social activities. As Dementia progresses, difficulties finding the right word and remembering names, losing objects, and other memory-related problems may occur.

Middle Stages of Dementia

During middle-stage Dementia, your loved one will require more care, but they still may be able to do things for themselves. Patients with middle-stage Dementia often have changes in sleeping patterns, confusion about everyday tasks, personality changes, and behavioral changes.

Late-stage Dementia

Late-stage Dementia is the most severe, and Dementia patients typically require full-time care, and during the end stages of the disease, care can be provided in a hospice setting. He or she cannot remember recent experiences, has difficulty communicating, and requires a greater amount of assistance to perform the essential “Activities of Daily Living” (ADLs).
Caring for a loved one with late-stage Dementia is difficult to say the least. Caregivers will encounter physical and emotional obstacles.

Caring for Late-Stage Dementia Patients

Caring for a loved one with late-stage Dementia is difficult to say the least. They require constant care from someone who is not only patient, kind, and loving, but also someone able to do tasks they are no longer able to complete on their own. Because of the numerous Challenges of End-of-Life Care for Dementia Patients, caregivers should not ignore the benefits of hospice for dementia patients and should consider utilizing professional assistance to ensure that their loved one is receiving proper and effective care.

People with late-stage Dementia will require more comprehensive assistance which may include help with communicating and going to the bathroom, and other everyday tasks many of us take for granted. You will have to make sure that you listen to their needs and understand what they are asking for from you.
Comforting Activities for Dementia Patients

Playing music can help Dementia patients relax. Since speech comes from a different part of the brain than music, some late-stage Dementia patients may be able to sing an old song that was once familiar, restoring joy they once had.

Whenever possible, take your loved one outside. They need the fresh air and sunshine just as much as you do. A simple hug, light hand rub, or massage can restore the human connection that they may feel they have lost.

Physical Complications of Late-stage Dementia

Late-stage Dementia patients often experience ulcers, bed sores, tumors, constipation, and arthritis if they are not mobile and are not having their position shifted on a regular basis. Often unable to express their pain, it is important to have a medical professional examine your friend or relative to determine if interventional pain management is necessary.

Swallowing ability should be assessed by a health care provider as well. If your loved one is having difficulty swallowing, not only will they have trouble eating but also taking medications. If this occurs, medication may need to be given intravenously.

Challenges of Communicating with Late-stage Dementia Patients

Communication is key. Make sure that you know and understand what certain things mean when they come from your loved one. If he or she cannot talk anymore, make hand signs for certain things such as when they have to go to the bathroom or need a drink of water. They may not be able to say “I need a drink”
but if they tap your shoulder, you will understand that means they’re thirsty.

**How it Feels to Be a Caregiver for a Dementia Patient**

Many times, caregivers feel sad, frustrated, or physically manifest stress in the form of pain. Caring for someone that requires a lot of attention can have an effect on your mental and physical health, as you may be experiencing fatigue or trouble sleeping. This can leave you feeling too tired or stressed to properly care for your loved one. But although it is difficult, it is critically important that caregivers tend to their own needs as well. This may involve simple breaks or in some situations, caregivers may elect short-term respite care which allows them to pass off caregiver responsibilities to a hospice care professional so that they can recharge or attend to their other responsibilities.

Though you may feel sad to see a loved one in pain, being a caregiver can help you build friendships and help you to understand that you aren’t going through it alone. There are support groups specifically for caregivers that help navigate through this uncertain time.

Caregivers are often viewed as babysitters, but they are better described as
What You Need to Know About Caring for Dementia Patients

Taking care of anyone, from children to adults, is no easy task. Caring for a Dementia patient can be overwhelming, but there will also be moments where caregivers will feel extremely rewarded. Here are some items at a glance that caregivers should remember:

- **Caregiving will be hard on relationships.** Being a caregiver can be very stressful so it’s crucial to learn stress management techniques to avoid taking it out on your partner, children, or other loved ones.
- **You’re going to need a break.** Just like with any stressful situation, sometimes you just need to have someone help you out a little bit and relax. Relying on others is not a sign of weakness or inability to provide good care. Caregivers should be realistic about their limitations in order to avoid “caregiver burnout.”
- **Being a caregiver is not like having another child.** It may be tempting to treat an elderly loved one as one of your kids because of their inability to perform adult tasks. Be mindful and respectful of their wishes at all times, while also remaining aware of medical recommendations provided by their physician.

Attributes of an Amazing Caregiver

Caregivers are often looked viewed as babysitters, but they are more like superheroes! Caregivers play a huge role in making sure that their loved ones stay healthy AND happy at the same time. Being a caregiver requires many different characteristics including:

- Flexibility
- Dependability
- Patience
- Empathy
- And so much more...

Hospice for Dementia Patients

Hospice for Dementia patients can greatly impact the lives of patients and their caregivers for the better. Harbor Light Hospice’s hospice care and other quality services offer the physical, mental, and emotional care that Dementia patients need during end-of-life. Additionally, caregivers can rely on hospice professionals to share the responsibilities of providing care which can help to alleviate the common feeling of stress and anxiety. Nobody wants to watch a loved one struggle with progressive Dementia, but patients and families should know that Harbor Light Hospice is ready to help them through their journey each step of the way.

Harbor Light Hospice is Ready to Support You and Your Loved One!

To learn more about the benefits of hospice care for Dementia patients or, to request more information on our compassionate care services – call one of our local offices directly or send us a message online today.