



Caregivers Of Dementia Patients Need Additional Support

The capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest meaning and significance. Pablo Casals

An integral part of the care provided by Hospice of the Red River Valley is the emotional support given to the family as they care for their terminally ill loved one. For the caregiver of a dementia patient, the role of the caregiver can be especially challenging.

Hospice social workers are skilled in assessing and addressing caregiver needs. Our social worker will help the caregiver identify their current support system – other family members, friends, church members and neighbors - who can assist in the care of their loved one. Our social worker can also assist in identifying community resources that may be available to come into the home to provide additional (to hospice) service. Receiving supportive counseling from a hospice social worker can be therapeutic in managing the care needs of both the patient and the family.

One of the biggest needs our caregivers have is for some relief from caregiving and there are options.

- In-patient respite (e.g. admission into the hospital) is one option but it can be more of a challenge for dementia patients because a change in environment often does more harm than good for the patient. Watching their loved one struggle to adjust causes additional stress for the caregiver and he or she may simply choose to spend that respite time in the hospital at the bedside.
- Support groups are another option, but many caregivers cannot take the time to go, and if they can free themselves up, they will likely use the time for running errands or even napping.
- Another often-used option is volunteers. Hospice of the Red River Valley has over 250 trained volunteers who can help with daily tasks as well as providing short-term respite so the caregiver can take a break.
- Nursing home placement may also be a possibility and many times a necessity. Our social worker

will help the family determine if and when this should be explored, assist with the discussion and the transition from home to the nursing home.

Grief for the caregiver of a dementia patient can be complicated. They may grieve the loss of their loved one twice – once when he or she loses the ability to be independent and can no longer recognize family members, and then again when that individual dies.

Currently there is no reimbursement for in-home respite through Medicare. While some insurance programs may cover this service, most dementia patients are Medicare patients. Depending on income level, there may be some county programs that can offer assistance as well as several private-hire options for families to consider.

Caregivers of dementia patients, as well as the caregivers of all terminally ill patients, need additional support. A referral to Hospice of the Red River Valley will insure that both the patient and the caregiver will receive the best possible care and support available at the end of life.

Each of our offices has resources on end-of-life issues available for the public on a loan basis. For more information about grief and loss, visit our website www.hrrv.org or call us at (800) 237-4629.