

## **P.O.E.M**

### Clinical Question:

Should clinicians be assessing the level of caregiver burden when providing preventative care to their patients? If burden is high, what resources are available for physicians to provide?

### Bottom Line:

Three in ten U.S. households reported at least one person providing unpaid care as a family caregiver. While caring for loved ones can be associated with many benefits, it can also be associated with physical, psychological and financial burdens. Family physicians can provide support to caregivers by assessing their burden (by using the smartphrase *.caregiver*) and offering resources such as local and national caregiving organizations, respite care, skills-training, and counseling (by using the smartphrase *.caregiverresources*)

### Reference:

Collins, Lauren; Swartz, Kristine. Caregiver Care. *Am Fam Phys.* 2011 Jun 1; 83(11):1309-1317.

### Synopsis:

Eighty percent of adults requiring long-term care currently live in the community, and unpaid family caregivers provide 90 percent of their care. Many provide over 20 hours of care each week. These numbers are expected to rise by 85 percent in the next decade as the population ages and the demand for services increase. Additionally, these caregivers provide an estimated \$375 billion in cost savings.

While caregiving can offer personal fulfillment and gratification, many caregivers become ill themselves. Caregivers are often responsible for housekeeping, errands, transportation, and personal care, and because of this they often become homebound and socially isolated. Caregivers have higher rates of insomnia and depression, and not only are they more at risk of serious illnesses they are also less likely to come in for preventative care. Many caregivers describe their health as fair or poor and 17% describe their health as having worsened since becoming a caregiver. Many recognize this decline in health as having affected their ability to provide care. Spousal caregivers who report having high levels of strain have a 23% higher Framingham Stroke Risk than their non-caregiver counterparts. Additionally, they have increased all-cause mortality.

In addition to a significant health burden, many caregivers are financially burdened by taking care of loved ones. Greater than 40% of caregivers have an annual household income of less than \$50,000 and many report spending on average \$5,531 of their own money yearly. Additionally, these caregivers often lose income, promotions, and retirement savings in providing care.

Family physicians or other health care team members can help understand this burden of care. Evaluation should include the caregiver's perception of their own well-being, the challenges and benefits of caregiving, the confidence in their ability to provide care as well as their access to support systems. A smartphrase (*.caregiver*) has been created for the Adapted Zarit Interview that can help guide the health team member in questions to ask caregivers to assess the level of burden. Additionally, a smartphrase (*.caregiverresources*) has been created for physicians to insert into patient instructions to provide patient caregivers with resources for in-home/respite care, transportation services, adult day programs, support groups and helpful web pages.

## Smartphrase: *.caregiver*

### Assessing Caregiver Burden: The Adapted Zarit Interview

- All questions are on a 0-4 scale. 0=never; 4=nearly always. Ranges from 0 to 48; higher scores correlate with higher levels of burden.
- Questions:
  - Do you feel that you don't have enough time for yourself because of the time you spend with the person whom you are providing care?
  - Do you feel stressed between caring for this person and trying to meet other responsibilities (work/family)?
  - Do you feel angry when you are around this person?
  - Do you feel that this person currently affects your relationships with family members or friends in a negative way?
  - Do you feel strained when you are around this person?
  - Do you feel that your health has suffered because of your involvement in the care of this person?
  - Do you feel that you don't have as much privacy as you would like because of this person?
  - Do you feel that your social life has suffered because you are caring for this person?
  - Do you feel that you have lost control of your life since this person's illness began?
  - Do you feel uncertain about what to do about this person?
  - Do you feel you should be doing more for this person?
  - Do you feel you could do a better job in caring for this person?

**Smartphrase:** *.caregiverresources*

### Caregiver Tips

- ❖ Plan Ahead
- ❖ Take one day at a time
- ❖ Accept help
- ❖ Get enough rest and nutrition
- ❖ Be good to yourself
- ❖ Learn about available resources
- ❖ Develop contingency plans
- ❖ Make time for leisure, rest, and relaxation
- ❖ Share your feelings with others
- ❖ Make your own health a priority

### Watch for Signs of Burnout:

- ❖ Losing interest in activities you enjoyed
- ❖ Trouble sleeping
- ❖ Feeling isolated
- ❖ Feeling guilty about spending time on yourself
- ❖ Getting sick more often
- ❖ Showing impatience or irritability
- ❖ Change in appetite

### In-home/Respite Care

1. Champlain Valley Agency on Aging (1-800-642-5119) can help set you up with:
  - Caregiver classes and support groups
  - Case management that can explain programs such as Choices for Care and respite grants
  - Weekly senior companionship
  - Housekeeping needs
  - Meals on Wheels
2. Homeshare Vermont [www.homesharevermont.org](http://www.homesharevermont.org); 802-863-5625
3. Organizations such as Home Instead, Armistead, and Bayada provide in-home non-medical care to help individuals live independently for a fee.
4. Residential Care Homes and Nursing homes also offer space on a weekly basis for respite care.

### Transportation

1. Addison County – 802-388-1946
2. Chittenden County – 802-878-1527
3. Franklin County – 802-527-1527
4. Grand Isle County – 802-371-6425

### Caregiver Registry

1. Vermont Direct Care Registry [www.rewardingwork.org/vt](http://www.rewardingwork.org/vt)  
A free up-to-date listing of direct care workers ready and willing to work. Call 1-800-642-5119 for an access code for the site.

### Adult Day Programs

1. CarePartners Adult Day Center; St. Albans [www.carepartnersvt.org](http://www.carepartnersvt.org); 802-527-0548
2. Project Independence; Middlebury, VT [www.elderlyservices.org](http://www.elderlyservices.org); 802-388-3983
3. Visiting Nurse Association; Colchester, Williston, South Burlington, VT [www.vnacares.org](http://www.vnacares.org); 802-658-1900

### Support Programs

1. Community Health Team - Ask your physician to refer you to the Community Health Team; it is free of charge.
2. Lotsa Helping Hands [www.lotsahelpinghands.com](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com)  
A free caregiving coordination web service where caregivers can create a private calendar accessed by friends and family members willing to help out.
3. National Family Caregiver Support Program <http://www.ddas.vermont.gov/ddas-programs/programs-oaa/programs-oaa-nfcsp>  
Designed to provide unpaid caregivers with the assistance they need in order to keep providing in-home care.