

Aging Matters

Aging is a Family Process

By Jack M. Rosenkranz, J. D.

The transition that the loved ones of elders experience is one of the most underestimated in the aging process. Recent research indicates that caregivers do not consciously label themselves as caregivers and therefore do not take advantage of the resources at their disposal until they have reached emotional and physical exhaustion. This phenomenon has a massive effect on the care of their aging loved one. Families of elders are far less knowledgeable about the resources available to caregivers than they are about the resources available for their aging loved one.

For more than ten years, Dr. Rhonda Montgomery and Dr. Jung Kwak have been researching the role of caregivers in the aging process. They have found that there are core issues associated with caregiving and the aging process: (1) The transition to the caregiver role is systematic and patterned; (2) Caregiving is dynamic and changes

over time; and (3) As caregivers experience the change in their role, they also experience a change in their own identity. The importance of these findings resides in their ability to inform families of aging elders about the resources and support services available for caregivers. Presumably, many families will have a primary caregiver with others who take on that role intermittently. As a result, the caregiver identity will manifest itself differently in each person and so the support needed by each caregiver will be different.

This research is part of a larger movement that takes a holistic and individualized approach to the aging process. Preparation for the aging process is about families not just individuals and support services should reflect that. One way to prepare for the transition is to consult professionals trained in recognizing both the individualized needs of the elder and the different needs of their caregivers and family members.



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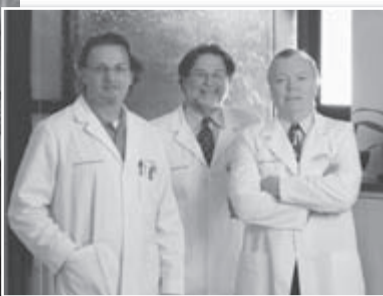
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