



## **Are You Caring for Your Caregivers? Consider These Questions.**

This checklist seeks to help you care for the family and other caregivers in your community, those who care for your patients at home, and across the care continuum. Who knows a person better than their family and friends? These special people surrounding your patients are a critical part of the care team too, but they often go unrecognized. In focusing on professional aspects of care, we sometimes underestimate the value these team members bring to the patient's care.

It's a remarkably common problem for all its invisibility. According to [hhs.gov](https://www.hhs.gov), there are "66 million Americans caring for an aging, seriously ill, or disabled family member or friend." Fortunately, more and more today, spouse, family, and friends are being recognized for their special and unique contributions to safety and quality of care.

Caregivers need education to be effective. Caring for a patient at home requires specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Often people find this situation thrust upon them with little preparation. Doubling the difficulty, caregivers face trying to learn the necessary skills while simultaneously coping with fear and anxiety.

But all is not gloom and doom. Healthcare providers can significantly improve patient care by treating these special caregivers as equal (or greater) contributors on the care team. Actively engaging caregivers with a patient-family unit approach cares for the caregivers, too, improving the experience as well as care outcomes. It all starts with fundamental caregiver education.

These questions may get you thinking about how effectively you're addressing caregiver needs in your population.

These are services caregivers find invaluable. Do you offer the following?

1. A help line, so that caregivers may call with questions?
2. Support groups, so that caregivers can share experiences?
  - Are they disease specific? (e.g., Alzheimer's, heart failure, cancer, etc.)
  - Groups discussing general skills and knowledge for safe care at home?
3. Educational programs so that caregivers can improve their knowledge and skills?
  - Classroom settings with curricula and goals for topics?
    - Where (i.e., can your caregivers attend within their ability to travel)?

- How often (i.e., will new caregivers have to wait for essential skills)?
- One-on-one?
- Self-guided instruction materials?

About your educational program:

1. Are educational materials available outside of an educational setting, without healthcare professionals? That is, can caregivers refresh or reinforce needed information on their own?
  - Are materials organized as a curriculum, guiding caregivers to acquire critical knowledge?
  - Is your educational content practical and evidence-based?
  - Are the materials presented in a standardized manner?
  - Is your professional staff knowledgeable about your caregiving materials?
  - Are they consistent in training, tools, and educating?
  - What is the feedback from caregivers about the educational training?
2. Does your caregiver education include topics such as:
  - Safety in the home?
  - Infection control and prevention awareness and procedures?
  - Signs & symptoms of infection?
  - How to handle adverse events or situations they may encounter?
  - When to call for professional assistance?
3. Do you have a Caregiver Coordinator, or other similar position responsible for organizing and leading caregiving support?
4. Have you performed a needs assessment or survey of caregiver needs?
  - What top 5 areas of assistance were requested?
  - Do caregivers feel confident and competent?
  - Do caregivers feel supported?
  - Do caregivers report improvement in their knowledge of how to provide care?
5. Do you consider family and other non-professional caregivers part of the care team?
  - Are you using their contributions effectively?
  - Do caregivers reduce your need for professional interactions?
6. Have you experienced, and can you respond timely to, caregivers' requests for additional support or resources?
  - Are your resources easy to find?
  - Is it easy for caregivers to request?

Please comment with your own thoughts and experience about the value and practice of family, friend, and other "lay" caregiver education and support programs.

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