

Caregivers

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Mark woke up early one morning to a phone call from his mother who lives about one hundred miles away. She said she was not feeling good and was having a hard time getting out of bed. Mark asked her if she could think ok and is not confused, and his mother said that she thought she could think ok and did not think she was confused. Mark said he would be there in a few hours. He also asked his mother if he needed to call for help for her and for now his mother said no. Mark arrived a few days later and his mother was still in the bed most of the time. Over the next week after evaluations, it became clear his mother had a stroke over night and she could not care for herself. Mark decided to move her to his house with his wife and three children.

These are common challenges with senior citizens and their caregivers. The elderly need care for them pending the issues they face. It is most important to find out if the issues are sudden or have been developing over time. Knowing the individuals 'Activities of Daily Living (ADL's)' is helpful and crucial. ADLs are basic self-care tasks which each person can do except as they grow older a person can become less adapt at each ADL. Mark had heard about ADL's but had never had to use these and asked a friend who lived next to them who was a nurse. Mark asked his neighbor about ADL's, and they said they would tell him and so write down what they talked about.

Mark's nurse friend told him about the ADL's and said what the ADL's were and he told Mark they were not too complex. . Mark's friend said the following The ADL's are: 1. Walking without assistance; 2. Feeding self without assistance, that is food can be moved from the plate to the mouth by the individual; 3. Dressing and grooming, that is a person can select their clothes and put on clothes without assistance and can manage their personal appearance; 4 Toileting, that is a person can get to and from a toilet, use the toilet appropriately and can clean oneself. 5. Bathing, that is one can wash their face and body in a bath or shower without assistance. 6. Transferring, that is one can move from one body position to another. This includes being able to move from a bed to a chair. This can mean getting up from a bed or chair and into a wheelchair or use a cane or crutch if needed.

Mark said that he understood what ADL's now and what he needed to look out for in a person. Mark's nurse friend said, 'it is when a person starts having trouble with the ADLs is when they will need 'caregiver' assistance. Suppose a patient was beginning to have trouble with dressing in the sense of looking like a good personal appearance and finding out that the person has not had new clothes for years and doesn't wash their clothes that much. These vignettes are just a few of many. For example, a family member who lives independently is having to feed themselves as they don't cook well and are having trouble eating as they don't like the food they prepare.

Mark's nurse friend said there are some more complex activities, which come in decline before the ADL's decline. He said a more specific type of skill sets which people can lose as they grow older are the IADL's, which stands for 'The Instrumental Activities of Daily Living.' These are the IADLs. 1. Managing finances that is paying bills and managing financial assets; 2. Managing transportation, that is either driving self or organizing other means of transportation. 3. Shopping and meal preparation. This covers everything required to get a meal on the table. It also covers shopping for clothing and other items required for daily life. 4. Housecleaning and home maintenance. This means cleaning the kitchen after eating, keeping one's living space reasonably clean and tidy, and keeping up with home maintenance. 5. Managing communication, such as the telephone or mail. 5. Managing medications and taking them as directed. Mark told his nurse friend how amazed he was with what is needed to care for those with declining health as they get older.

Mark was seeing how important are both the ADL's and the IADL's, which are important both to the individual themselves or to be understood by those close to others, such as family and close friends. Sometimes it is the person at hand which first starts to realize there are issues they need help with and address this with e.g., a child or sibling or close friend they feel comfortable to address the issues at hand. For example, they have trouble driving and thus getting medications or groceries or other things. Once at home they can cook, clean and pay bills but driving is the issue.

Mark's friend gave him a second example that is a person is having trouble paying bills on time. The issue is forgetfulness and thus the concern about memory issues is the cause of bill paying or lack of paying. Mark sees that it is often a family

member who finds out about the lack of bills being paid, which can affect for example electricity or water being able to be used at their house as due to lack of pay they are cut off. All these examples show the need of caregivers. Along with this example is that if the person at hand is not paying their bills or forgetting the issue is also memory issues which may need to be addressed by a medical doctor to see if in fact the lack of memory is the cause of this issue and not just the bills not getting paid.

Mark nurse friend was pointing out a larger issue as not just the need for caregivers but the time a caregiver needs to give to others and do they have the time to give to either their family or friend. Further, are more than one caregiver able to help as issues mount with a single person. For example, a caregiver is not needed just to get medications or groceries, but a second person is needed to help with cleaning this person's house. This may have many variable examples. If the individual has several children, they may be able between them to address these issues. If the individual has adequate financial resources, they can pay for transportation and cleaning people to help in their house, or the children have financial resources, and they can pay for transportation and cleaning. Mark told his nurse friend how they have to take care of all of the different directions of potential caregivers and not wait but move as soon as they can so the decline with the patient or family is not accelerated more so than if they had a caregiver.

Mark's nurse friend said clearly to Mark a challenging situation and said, 'however, if the individual at hand has no available children and little additional financial resources they may see if local governments have resources to help or close or nearby friends who could help.' This sounded intimidating to Mark, but his nurse friend said this is not illegal nor does it mean Mark does not care for his family member. It is just another increase in help for his family especially here relating to his mother.

Mark was seeing that the point is that caregiving is very broad and solely depends on the needs of an individual at a given point of time and how fast the decline an individual is undergoing. Some people are declining slowly over the years and thus there is time for them to find these caregiver resources to help them. A more challenging situation is for example a person has a stroke and after leaving the hospital in a week or so they need help immediately as they slowly improve over a few weeks. Finding caregivers that quickly to help is a challenge. The challenge

is that many families and friends cannot so quickly adjust their schedule and also make the adjustment for a long period of time if needed. Mark was seeing that this is the challenge with families and their numbers and also how much money they have or don't.

Mark's nurse friend said 'one other and final issue of caregiving is that does the caregiver have insight into the needs a person has and how quickly are changes taking place and can the caregiver make these adjustments. Some changes are slow and thus the caregiver has time to adjust, but others are rapidly changing. Key is their resources to help the person at hand. For example, government social services can direct a caregiver to other resources to people with slow or rapid change in their ability to do their ADL's or IADL's. Further are there nursing homes available whether short term or long term. Often the social worker can help fill in gaps, which are available and thus the person at hand can easily stay at home at least for the foreseeable future. It is a team effort, which often helps the person at hand to have their needs addressed.

Mark's nurse friend said he would like to summarize what he had mentioned to Mark about his mother's decline and how Mark and/or his family help with caregiving. Summarizing, Mark nurse friend said, 'caregivers can have lots of experience or not much experience, but they are available to help with the ADL's and/or IADL's and come up with a game plan for the foreseeable future will be able to help a senior citizen.'

Mark was so excited about how to be a caregiver for his mother, but his hope was not so high given his mother's decline. Mark asked his mother how he could have hope in this situation knowing his mother was rapidly declining. Mark's nurse friend said that our hope is not in people or work or family but in a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Though Mark had heard about Jesus he did not know much. His nurse friend said that the Bible says 'I put all my hope in the Lord. He leaned down to me; he listened to my cry for help. He lifted me up out of the pit of death, out of the filth, and set my feet on solid rock.' Mark's nurse friend said that hope is in Jesus Christ, and we need to have our faith in him. Mark asked how to have that belief in Christ. Mark prayed a prayer with his friend's help and he came to put his faith in Jesus Christ and since then he had hope in life through Jesus and more hope in helping his mother as a caregiver.

