

Church as a “Go to Place” for Family Caregivers – Evidence Based Programs

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Chronic conditions are on the rise across the nation and can lower quality of life for older adults and contribute to the leading causes of death among this population. Developing evidence-based programs in your congregations and organizations are a proven way to promote health and prevent disease among older adults. Older Americans overwhelmingly prefer to stay in their homes, churches, and communities as they age. The ultimate goal is to improve the health, function, and quality of life of older adults.

The most common chronic conditions include:

- Heart Disease
 - Cancer
- Chronic bronchitis or emphysema
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes mellitus
- Alzheimer's & Dementia

Family members often assume a role – caregiving - for which they are unprepared and untrained. The role is based on their relationship with the person, but it is often different than their longstanding relationship with the person. This program aims to help instill or increase a caregiver’s sense that s/he understands that caregiving is a new role that s/he has assumed and that s/he is effective in this role.

As a society, we have always depended on family caregivers to provide the lion’s share of long-term services and supports (LTSS) for our elders. Yet the need to recognize and support caregivers is among the most significant overlooked challenges facing the aging U.S. population, their families, and society.

By 2030, 72.8 million—more than one in five U.S. residents—will be age 65 or older. The greatest growth will be in the numbers of the “oldest old,” the population that is most in need of help because they are the most likely to have physical, cognitive, and other functional limitations.

While the need for caregiving is rapidly increasing, the pool of potential family caregivers is shrinking. Families have fewer children, older adults are more likely to have never married or to be no longer be married, and adult children often live far from their parents or may be caring for more than one older adult or their own children.

- As our population ages, a growing number of American adults will serve as caregivers for loved ones who are young, disabled, frail, elderly, or suffering from a chronic condition.
- This rapidly increasing number of family caregivers has become an essential component of the nation's health care system, providing more services in the home – free of charge – than the federal government provides in all settings combined.
- The church needs to and must come up with a compassionate response to reach out to their members and to those in the community at large who are hurting.
- A ministry of care to older adults is an opportunity for the church to provide pastoral care, compassion, presence, encouragement, resources, respite, programs and support to individuals and families on the caregiving journey. Members of the congregation are invited to volunteer to serve in ways that are unique, meaningful and life-changing. The church should be one of the best sources for volunteers to serve in our communities.

I would like to encourage our congregations to introduce three evidence-based programs as a foundational piece into Older Adult Ministries in their congregations. The importance of introducing Evidence Based Programs (EBPs) as a foundational piece to OAM is that they have been found to be effective, based on the results of rigorous evaluations, and then subjected to critical peer review by experts in the field who have agreed with the conclusions about the programs' effects. They are transformational. These three are:

Powerful Tools for Caregivers – PTC is based on the highly successful Chronic Disease Self-Management Program developed by Dr. Kate Lorig and her colleagues at Stanford University. Powerful Tools for Caregivers is a national program sustained by extensive collaborations with community-based organizations.
www.powerfultoolsforcaregivers.org

A Matter of Balance – is an 8-week structured group intervention that emphasizes practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels. Developed by a grant from Administration on Aging Maine Health's Partnership for Healthy Aging (orig. Boston Univ – Fear of Falling.) PFHA@mainehealth.org

Savvy Caregiver - The Savvy Caregiver Program is licensed to and can be purchased from Healthcare Interactive. The University of Minnesota provided the fundamental research behind today's Savvy Caregiver training program - http://license.umn.edu/technologies/z08156_the-savvy-caregiver-program-for-alzheimer-caregiver-training

I encourage you to find out more about these Evidence Based Programs by going to their websites and learning more about their effectiveness. They can be introduced one at a time and are often offered by local area agencies on aging.