Caring for Caregivers

Rev. Percy McCray
When you consider cancer care ministry, you most likely envision helping people with a cancer diagnosis through prayer, fellowship and practical assistance. However, many people affected by cancer do not even have the disease.

In fact, cancer can affect caregivers and family members as much or even more than the people with cancer.

Caregivers tend to spend a lot of time worrying. Since they are unable to change the big things, they may become anxious and highly stressed about the small things such as schedules, routines, finances and housework.

Sometimes caregivers can become so caught up in caring for the patients that they fail to take care of their own health. The constant physical and emotional grind of caring for someone can wear down a person’s immune system, along with their mind.
Ministry to caregivers and others affected by a cancer diagnosis involves flexibility. Their schedules may be full, their responsibilities overwhelming. Look for ways you can offer support and be their friend. Perhaps there are ways you can share in or relieve some of their burdens.

Here are some practical ways to offer support.

- **Regular visits.** They can be short, long, restful, or even work trips. Look for what would bless the caregiver most.

- **Prayer (for and with).** Be attentive to what is on their heart and pray for that, you may find it differs from what you might think.
Practical Ministry for Caregivers

- **Helping with chores.** This can be anything from housework to grocery shopping to helping with seasonal decorations (sometimes the small things can add peace of mind).

- **Smiling.**

- **Meals** (preparation or coordination).

- **Remembering special occasions** that may become lost in the shuffle.

- **Offering a shoulder to cry on.** Don’t feel obligated to try and fix everything, sometimes just being there can help more than you know.
Practical Ministry for Caregivers

- **Giving them a break** so they can have a night off, go shopping or get some rest. Sometimes filling in and helping for an evening here or there can make all the difference in the world to those who have to give constant attention to their loved one.

- **Encouraging words**, cards, emails and notes. Caretakers often feel isolated.

- **Starting a new activity with them**. Be willing to adapt your preferences to their comfort zone — you may not like bowling, but they might love it!

- **Meeting them where and when they are able** (both in terms of scheduling, and spiritual maturity).
Helping them stay active physically and socially, even if it is at a reduced level.

Helping them get to church or bringing church to them.

Celebrating with caretakers. We need to make a special effort to celebrate with caregivers whenever the patient experiences a small victory, and remind the caregiver that they were part of that process.
Rev. Percy McCray Jr. has spent more than 20 years ministering to cancer patients and their caregivers at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA).

He recognizes cancer care ministry as a special calling from God and considers faith a key, but often overlooked, component of cancer treatment. He now serves as the Director of Faith-Based Programs at CTCA® and provides leadership to the pastoral care staff at all five CTCA hospitals. In addition, Rev. McCray oversees Our Journey of Hope®, a nationwide cancer-care ministry training and support program.

An ordained minister, Rev. McCray is a member of the U.S. Chaplain Association. He has been recognized as one of the “most influential African Americans in Lake County (IL)” by the Chicago People’s Voice newspaper for his religious and leadership roles within the community.
Health, Hope & Inspiration is a weekly radio broadcast, sponsored by Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA), designed to help people find answers to questions about cancer, cancer prevention and overall healthy living. One of the greatest gifts a person can enjoy is good health. A well-rounded lifestyle is the product of physical, emotional and spiritual health. These three things are interdependent, and that is the message of Health, Hope & Inspiration, as well as the basis of the integrative approach at CTCA®.

For more information, visit our website at www.HealthHopeAndInspiration.com.
© IPB 2018