

Male Caregivers

Shifting roles among family caregivers

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BACKGROUND: More than 16 million men in the United States are acting in the role of family caregiver. Men are usually viewed as not being caring simply because they provide care differently than women. However, this is not the case.

OBJECTIVES: This article explores male caregiving from the perspective of family and professional roles.

METHODS: A review of the literature related to men in the caregiving role was conducted. This review included only men providing care to a family member and was limited to men caring for an adult.

FINDINGS: The main traits of male caregivers were defined as masculinization of caregiving behaviors, social support needs, and caregiver role strain/emotional aspects of caring. Men in the caregiving role must be supported. Education related to how men provide care is needed. Hands-on education should also be provided to men in the family caregiving role.

KEYWORDS

family caregivers; spouse caregivers; male; caregiving role

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/19.CJON.E17-E24

THE NURSING PROFESSION IS BUILT ON THE MODEL OF PROVIDING CARE. Henderson (1966) stated that nurses help sick or well individuals in the performance of activities contributing to health or recovery (or to peaceful death), which those people would do for themselves if they had the requisite strength, will, or knowledge, and help them become independent of such help as rapidly as possible. Although this is true of nurses, according to Reinhard, Levine, and Samis (2012), many family members in the community setting are increasingly taking on the role of caregiver. Many times, caregiving is provided by individuals who have little to no training in providing care. Today, complex procedures previously performed by professionals in the healthcare setting are being provided by family caregivers within the home (Accius, 2017).

In 2015, more than 40 million family caregivers provided unpaid care to a parent, spouse, friend, or other adult loved one in the United States (AARP, 2015). Family caregivers help with everyday activities and personal tasks, such as bathing, dressing, caring for wounds, managing medication, arranging transportation, and managing finances. Although most family caregivers are women, men are increasingly taking on the role of a family caregiver. Accius (2017) reported that 40% of family caregivers, roughly 16 million, are male.

Traditionally, women have been socialized in the caregiving role. For example, based on traditional gender roles, girls took babysitting classes, whereas boys were coached by their fathers in outdoor activities and athletics. Often, boys are taught to be dominant and not to show emotional vulnerability, whereas girls are taught to be sensitive to the needs of others, which is often viewed as caring behavior (Cancian & Olicker, 2000). Although women have made strides in gaining equality in the workforce, many women still “uphold gender divisions of labor across the life course, which designate them primarily responsible for such domestic labor as care work” (Calasanti, 2010, p. 726).

The purpose of this article is to explore male caregiving and define characteristics of male caregivers. In addition, this article will examine interventions that nurses can provide to better support men in the caregiving role.

Methods

An interprofessional literature search about the concept of male caregiving included the EBSCO databases CINAHL®, MEDLINE®, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, PsycINFO®, SocINDEX, and Academic Search Complete. The keywords *caregiving*, *caregiver*, *cancer*, and *men* were used to identify articles about male family caregivers, particularly those focusing on men providing care for patients with cancer.