Overview for Caregivers

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The very first thing for anyone caring for someone with a chronic illness is to make a priority of caring for yourself. The use of the word "chronic" should be kept in mind always. What you are dealing with is a problem that won't go away. Caregiver burnout is a very difficult and prevalent situation Some days will be more difficult than others, some easier, but please take care of yourself otherwise you will be unable to do what your patient needs to the best of your ability.

A useful aid in this ongoing care is a "health journal". Recording what is going on with a patient on a daily basis, and how you are dealing with it can be of great assistance, both for yourself and the health professionals who are helping your patient. Simply record what problems arise - dealing with sleep disorders, irritable bowel problems and the myriad of things that arise during the course of these illnesses. This is the "inside information" you need to do the very best and least stressful caregiving.

The "outside information" comes from treating medical practitioners, support groups and information found in books, and online (if you really want to be current). In the past several years so much information has come out with regard to the illnesses that it is almost impossible to know what will assist you best. If you don't use a computer, your local library can help you out, as well as the organizations you may subscribe to, in your hunt for help.

If you look at the various areas on the www.mefmaction.net website, you will find the Overviews of the Canadian Consensus Documents and resources a great help in current research and treatment. There are also a number of links to websites that might give you some ideas of what to look for, and how others are dealing with them.

Don't forget to note the financial assistance you may need. If the person who is ill has been working, and then must quit because of their condition, or take an extended leave, or work part time, there will be financial repercussions. See the disability and legal sections on this website for articles on these topics as well as links to other information sources. One of the advantages of belonging to a caregivers' support group is that you can discover how others have dealt with these problems and find resources to help you. The patient's physician can also help with these issues.

Please remember that you will have a long and sometimes difficult situation ahead of you. Be patient with yourself and your patient. Take a break from the situation occasionally. Talk with friends and family who support you. Search out

the things that can help you keep your balance and continue with the work you have ahead of you.

On behalf of all those who suffer, thank you for caring.