NEUROLOGY GROUP of BERGEN COUNTY

DEMENTIA CAREGIVER SUPPORT

The caregiver of a person with dementia is often referred to as the hidden or second victim of dementia. The physical results of caregiver stress can include fatigue, stomach problems, headaches and difficulty sleeping. The emotional stress of caregiving can cause depression, tension, anger, guilt, loss of self esteem, and feelings of being overwhelmed. In addition, many caregivers feel that their feelings and needs are not understood. Unfortunately, most caregivers do not recognize the association between the stress of caregiving and their physical and emotional symptoms. It is critical that you do not neglect your physical and mental health.

Caregivers are at an increased risk of serious illness (including circulatory and heart conditions, respiratory disease and hypertension), increased physician visits and use of prescription medications, emotional strain, anxiety and depression.

There are a variety of additional resources available:

- **Support groups** – joining a support group is an opportunity to be in a safe and caring environment where your concerns are shared with other caregivers. Such groups offer emotional and moral support, practical information and hope during a time of profound challenges.
- The **Alzheimer's Association** offers support groups at various times in different community settings at no charge to the participant. The groups offered fall into three different categories: Family Support Groups, Grief and Bereavement Groups, and Groups for People in the Early Stages of Alzheimer's Disease. More information is available at www.alz.org
- The **National Institutes of Health / National Institute on Aging** offers a host of free information for caregivers, including information on daily activities, managing medications, healthy eating, exercise, coping with agitation, etc. This information is available on the Internet at www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers or by phone at 1-800-438-4380.
- **Valley Home Care** – licensed home health agency affiliated with The Valley Hospital, that provides various nursing and home care services; located in the Dorothy B. Kraft Center in Paramus; they can be reached at 201-291-6000.
- **Further reading**:
    1. **The 36 Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease and Dementing Illnesses** by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins, M.D. (1991)
    2. **Understanding Alzheimer's Disease** by Miriam K. Aronson, EdD (editor) (1988)
    3. **Unplanned Journey: Understanding the Itinerary – Reflections of a Caregiver** by Susan G. Miller (1999)
    4. **Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's: Your Easy-to-use Guide** published by the NIH/NIA (see contact information above)