

Take Care to *Give* Care

Missy Thomas, Director Of Care Services

I admit it: I watch Dr. Phil. There's just something about that big bald head, the overly hairy upper lip and the cheesy catch phrases. "How's that workin' for ya?" "No matter how flat you make a pancake, it's got two sides." "When you choose the behavior, you choose the consequence." I probably started watching when I was a single college student and now that I have 2 boys and have been married for 15 years, I confess there have been some relationship tips and parental guidelines I have also picked up from the show. One concept that has stuck with me over the years is the idea that I have to take care of my children's mother. To give care to my family, in a loving and patient way, I need to first care for myself. This was a foreign thought to me and it seemed so self-ish...which is also a very common thread for other family caregivers as well.

There are more than 90 million Americans taking care of a loved one. Most don't even consider themselves a "Caregiver" and most don't consider the need to take care of themselves. Caregiving is stressful and can be both physically and emotionally demanding. But to be healthy and strong enough to handle Caregiving responsibilities, it's necessary to "Take Care to Give Care," which is the theme for National Family Caregivers Month this November.

Not only do I appreciate a good Dr. Phil episode every once in a while (ok, I record it every day...reruns and all), but I'm also kind of prone to laughter and humor and how beneficial it is to our health and heart. Though Caregiving is no laughing matter, recently comedian Jeff Foxworthy teamed up with AARP to bring a little comic relief to the topic and tweaked his You Might Be A Redneck bit: "If you can remember your parents' social security number, but can't remember your own, you're probably a caregiver." "If you've ever changed a dressing while cooking a turkey with dressing, you might be a caregiver." "If you start dividing your M&M's into a pill box, chances are you're a caregiver."

Caregivers need our love, encouragement and laughter. They need to connect with others and know it's not only appropriate for them to take care of themselves, it's necessary. We thank them for supporting the people we all love and look forward to providing them with a chance to take a break and network with other caregivers at our Caregiver Conference in December. For more information on how we can help caregivers Take Care to Give Care, or more details on our upcoming conference, contact Northwoods Caregivers (218-333-8264, www.northwoodscaregivers.org).

And hug a caregiver today.

