



**PHOEBE MINISTRIES**

## **Caring for the Caregiver: Phoebe Offers Support for those Caring for Loved Ones with Dementia**

**By Kelly O'Shea Carney, PhD, CMC**

**Executive Director, Phoebe Center for Excellence in Dementia Care**

Caring for an individual with dementia is a full time job and it can take an enormous toll on the family members providing care. Due to the stress of caregiving, caregivers are at higher risk for depression, acute and chronic illnesses, and even premature death. At the same time, the nation's entire system of care for individuals with dementia relies heavily upon family caregivers.

Family members provide approximately \$210 billion worth of unpaid care to individuals with dementia each year, exceeding the \$200 billion spent on paid caregivers. Clearly, family caregivers play an important role in supporting their loved ones with dementia by providing the emotional support and hands-on care that each individual needs to thrive. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we find ways to take care of the caregivers in our communities.

Fortunately, caregivers can benefit from specialized resources and support. Education about dementia, its progression and how to manage the changes in behavior and function that occur is critical to the well-being of caregivers. In fact, a recent published study showed that educating caregivers about dementia and its management effectively reduced the need for medications to manage behaviors in dementia and improved caregiver coping skills. Phoebe Ministries understands the importance of educating caregivers.

“Dementia Education for Caregivers,” a series of twelve interactive modules delivered in the privacy of the caregiver's home was developed by Phoebe At Home Services to provide the tools and strategies every caregiver needs to do his or her job well. In addition, studies have found that support groups focused on the unique needs of caring for someone with dementia are very helpful in sustaining the health and well-being of the caregiver. Support groups provide caregivers with a social network to

lean on, suggestions for coping with the specific challenges of caregiving and a sense that they are not alone. Phoebe offers monthly support groups and regular educational programs for caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias on several campuses.

The Allentown campus also features an Early Stage Memory Loss Support Group for individuals who are coping with a new diagnosis of dementia. Finally, due to the progressive nature of the disease, caregivers struggle with the ever changing needs of their loved ones. The behaviors and abilities of the affected individual change over time, and each time a change occurs, the response of the caregiver must also change. Managing this "moving target" of care can be difficult and many families find that they need advice about how to meet newly emerging needs.

To support these caregivers, Phoebe offers private geriatric care management services through Phoebe At Home Services. These services are delivered by a certified care manager who comes to the home of the individual, assesses the needs of the individual and caregiver, and provides guidance to the family on how to best meet those needs. The care manager can communicate with the doctor, set up home care, help the family with decision-making and advocate on behalf of the person with dementia to ensure that they get the best possible care.

At Phoebe, we understand that caring for people with dementia requires caring for the caregiver. That is why we offer a range of services and supports designed to assist the caregivers so that they can do what they do best – care for their loved one.