

## **Be Prepared for Caregiving**

*By Shannon Ingram*

You finally booked a vacation to Europe that you've been planning for two years. You're planning your daughter's dream wedding. You've just started grad school to get the advance degree you've always wanted. Suddenly you receive a call that changes everything. Maybe your mom was found wandering the streets unable to find her way home and has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Or perhaps your loved one has received a life-threatening diagnosis of cancer, Parkinson's or ALS. Regardless of what it is, everything will change very suddenly and the lives of you and your loved one will be forever altered.

As you grieve over the loss of your plans and pray for the strength to embrace your new role as a family caregiver, it's important to know that you won't be able to do everything you normally do now. Your life simply won't be the same.

Karen Twichell, author of the book, *A Caregiver's Journey – Finding Your Way*, and its compatible workbook, says there are three things you can do immediately when faced with the chaos of instant caregiving. "The better prepared we are, the more confidence we have in our ability," says Twichell.

The first is EDUCATION. Twichell says you should get out there and learn everything you can about the disease, the medications and treatment options, possible side-effects of both the disease and the med's and the overall prognosis for your loved one. This is disarming at first, but it's better than fighting an unknown enemy. When you research and learn about the illness, then you know what to expect. You can be prepared for changes as the disease progresses and the medications change. Find out about important services such as at home care, assisted living and skilled nursing facilities that may be able to help you. Learn as much as you can about Medicare, health insurance and navigating the healthcare system.

ORGANIZATION is your next step. Paperwork can be an overwhelming part of the caregiving task. Immediately after learning of the diagnosis, put together a treatment journal so you can keep all of your information in one place. You might want to get a binder, three-hole punch and section separators. Have a section for a calendar so you can plan appointments and review important dates in the past. Add sections for physician information, medication lists and details, plus any other important documents for your patient. Take your journal with you to all appointments.

Finally, SELF-CARE is critically important. Twichell maintains that being a caregiver is all-consuming at times, but you can't forget to take care of yourself too. Taking some time every week to do something just for you is essential to caring for a loved one. Your new mantra is, "I now allow others to love and support me." Accepting offers of assistance from others is a learned skill. With practice, you

can learn to accept an offer from a friend to prepare a meal, pick up your dry cleaning, bring you a nonfat latte from Starbucks or drop off a couple of DVD's for you to enjoy.

Most humans like to be needed. It's comforting to us. Preparing to be a caregiver will give you confidence in your own ability to offer dignity to a loved one who needs your help.

Shannon Ingram is Director of Marketing for **Silverado Senior Living** and author of a book, *The Heart Way- A Journey from Corporate to Care*. For information about Silverado, visit [www.silveradosenior.com](http://www.silveradosenior.com).