

THE WARMTH OF CAREGIVERS

A coat keeps you warm. It envelops you and protects you from the cold and rain. The protection your coat offers you, is selflessly given by caregivers to their fellow man. Caregivers take on a significant part of the care for an ill partner, a parent in need of help, a family member or handicapped child. It isn't rare that they are the ones who make it possible for the patient to stay home. Caregivers are vital but also priceless in our society.

Most people don't consciously choose to become a caregiver. Due to disease or being in need of help of a fellow man they spontaneously take on this role. Care giving can also be organized, for example with a person who is in heavy need of help or has a terminal illness. People who feel connected to this person, can make mutual agreements in terms of help and care when the needs become too large to handle for one or multiple people.

However, care giving goes unnoticed very often. Sometimes we think it's the natural thing to do, while it definitely isn't all that natural to put aside a (sometimes huge) part of your life in order to care for another person. Caregivers often don't have it easy. The combination of family obligations, personal work and other responsibilities doesn't come naturally. That's why a caregiver can rarely spare the time to think of himself.

There are several factors caregivers better keep in mind to avoid overloading themselves. People often don't re-

alize that they are a caregiver or are gradually getting into this role. They see the care they offer as obvious, even if in time it goes way further than the normal kind of care in a relationship, household or family. If the care eventually becomes too large, this can cause problems. Often it's the people who have always taken on a bigger kind of care within the household or family who take on the greatest or even the only share of care giving. Family members who live far away, are for example less often involved. This can cause the caregiver to become isolated and overloaded. Due to an increasing amount of care the part of leisure time and care for themselves becomes increasingly smaller. There is no more time for their own personal life. As time passes, the caregiver won't have any breathing space left and can become frustrated, overtired and overloaded. It's important that the caregiver realizes this so help can be found before it comes to this.

The day of Caregivers, each year a beautiful moment to put all caregivers in the spotlight, to restore their confidence and thank them for their endless commitment. It's also a good time to point out how important caregivers are in our society. Even in a perfectly expanded professional caring system care giving remains of the utmost importance. Caregivers form an indispensable link in our caring society. No matter how well-expanded our professional care is, it's essential that people keep taking care of each other.