

THE AGONY AND ECSTASY OF
CAREGIVERS
(Burnout and Preventive Action)



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THE DILEMMAS OF NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Kalpaka Subramanian

‘Kaushalya supraja ramapurva sandhya pravartate.....’

“Oh! Amma is awake!” she exclaimed. Pramila noticed the time on her mobile phone. It was 5.30 in the morning; she got up in a hurry.

“Amma, coffee, please.....”

“Come to the kitchen, at least for your coffee,” Amma said.

Pramila wanted to go to the kitchen when the phone rang. She was irritated. She picked it up. It was her close friend, Mala, from Mumbai. She told Mala that she would call back shortly. She wanted to see the messages on WhatsApp first. There were very many ‘Good Morning’ messages.

And, in the middle of these nondescript messages, there was one that was screaming for Pramila’s attention. She got riveted to it. The message said, “Every bad situation will have something positive. Even a dead clock shows the right time twice a day. Stay positive. God knows what is best for you.” This was a really thought-provoking message.

She came to the hall with her cup of coffee, wanted to talk to Mala who was having some new problem with her father-in-law who had been bedridden for over five years. However, before speaking to her she got lost in her own thoughts.

Some women, after marriage, don’t bother to do anything for their husband’s parents or siblings. Some slog for their in-laws but are always taken for granted. Forget about rewards, they don’t even get due appreciation or the respect that they deserve.

As every coin has two sides, so also does the family relationship. If the father-in-law is kind and affectionate, the daughter-in-law too will be so, or else will become non-co-operative. It is very difficult, though not impossible, to find a family where co-operation, understanding, love, and affection exist.

Mala's father-in-law is a very stubborn, demanding, dominating, commanding, and selfish old man. Mala's husband is their only son. He does everything for his father, yet he merely says 'after all it is only your duty'.

They managed to appoint an attendant through an Agency, but that torture was worse than that of the father-in-law. Mala became like their servant. Every three months, the Agency would change the attendant and Mala would be half dead teaching them each and everything all over again. Still, they would not do their duty properly, always glued to their mobile phones. Once they go on leave, they don't come back. Mala would decide enough of the problems she was having with the servants, now she would do everything herself.

When only one member of the family is earning why should they incur so much expenditure? But the non-co-operation of her father-in-law used to irritate her. She used to be extremely patient but everything has a limit, right? Mala herself is not very young. She is in her seventies.

Though Pramila felt pity for her, she could not do anything more than just advise her. She has reached a stage when she does not mingle with friends, lost her interest in the activities that she previously enjoyed, feels irritated, can't sleep, and gets sick very often. Pramila used to tell her to take proper care of herself, exercise, take plenty of rest, do yoga and remember to laugh.

Everyone has stress. Whenever overworked or sleep deprived we feel stress. Our body automatically increases BP, heart rate in a real stressful situation, without making adjustments; we undergo stress, which can even threaten our life.

The phone rings again. It is Mala once more. Pramila had totally forgotten to call her. She asked her what the new bombshell was. Mala said that her daughter who has settled abroad needs to undergo some surgery and requires Mala's help urgently. Pramila was lost in a sea of happiness and sorrow. "I will think of a solution and call you back," she said.

Give yourself a break. If you are not regularly taking time off to de-stress and to re-charge your batteries you will end up accomplishing less in the long run. After a break, you will feel more energetic. Think that your body is a car. With the right fuel and proper maintenance, it will run well. If one neglects, it will cause trouble.

She called Mala and told her to admit her father-in-law in a good Senior Citizen's Home. "Go to your daughter, help her and stay with her for a few months and come back fresh. Go with your husband so that you don't have to worry about him either."

Ten days later, Pramila received a call from Mala. "We are leaving for the USA next month and will be back only after four months." Her joy knew no bounds. She

told her sincere prayers for Mala and her daughter from the bottom of her heart. “Don’t forget to take care of your health and remember to laugh.”

In conclusion, we can emphatically assert that before stress turns into a serious illness, it is better to see a doctor or a psychologist, otherwise, it can lead to serious depression. There are a number of ways through which stress can kill you.

There are ways to kill stress also-

Go for a long drive.

Keep writing/reading something

Think always positive.

Nothing is in our hands.

Eat healthy food.

Go for a walk/do yoga.

Mix with your friends, go shopping, watch cinema, etc.

Develop some regular hobby.

Last but not least, remember to Laugh.

‘Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass but learning to dance in the rain.’

THE CONFESSION OF A CAREGIVER

Rajalakshmi Siva

Pramila had never been inside a hospital other than to give birth to her children. The wait outside the ultra-sonogram scan room was the first awe-inspiring moment. The first bit of advice to those who are pushed into such a situation is to never let the patient know how you feel. The pit of the stomach might be itching to cut loose, and when the doctor says, come and see me tomorrow, come alone, leave the patient behind at home, you smell something is seriously amiss. But the fear needs to be reined in and kept under wraps before it leaps from you to him. Pramila had to be careful and time her visit to the doctor's office to coincide with her visit to the grocery—so no suspicions were raised. She almost literally buckled at the knees when advised that there was no way his ailment could be fully managed in this town. The doctor said that there was a mass of some type at the outlet of the bladder. So everyone needs to be informed, everyone but the patient himself, Pramila's husband, Kuppuswamy.

A lot of secret scheming went behind his back as to how to go about it and preserve the unpleasant surprise for him till the very end of the treatment. The announcement was made, and the plan chalked out. The various options, risks, advantages, and alternative treatment options were considered and discussed openly.

Managing home chores and hospital duties throughout the ten-day hospital stay post the nine-hour surgery proved to be a Herculean task for her. She doesn't recall how they managed it.

The patient was like a baby who needed tending, as he re-learned to walk, tottering and stumbling initially. He even had to struggle to be understood when he spoke. Words did not come out, only air did. Even the handling of the now man-made excretory system needed to be learned all over again. And they needed all the patience in the world, a lot of love and the ability to do everything with a benign smile. No other emotion could be displayed at that sensitive juncture.

"I can't brush my teeth all by myself," you would think it is the grandchild

wailing, no, it is the seventy-year-old, re-learning his activities of daily living.

Dysgeusia is yet another phenomenon that you need to tackle. It means everything tastes the same—like dishwasher; everything smells the same—like the municipal garbage bin. So what do you feed him? With a kind word here and there, just like it works for a three-year-old, the feeding gets done. Yet when suddenly, he says after a few months, that the potato fry was excellent, the floodgates of hope re-open.

Soon he takes a bath unaided and even wants to get online. The Skype account gets activated once more. He even settles down with a new job on hand in the days ahead. They open a boutique and he looks after the financial aspects. This keeps them well occupied and his mind is away from his ailment.

THE MOST JOYOUS MOMENT:

When on Day-3 or Day-4 after the robotic cystoscopy, the neurosurgeon shows up and says the histopathologist searched and searched and couldn't find any trace of a malignancy. Hence, there was nothing for which the medical oncologist or the radiation oncologist could intervene for the time being.

THE MOST DEVASTATING MOMENT:

The one when while waiting for the end of an estimated 5-hour surgery, they were into the seventh hour, a nurse of gigantic proportions (or so she seemed in that state of mind) shouts Kuppuswamy, Kuppuswamy, where is Kuppuswamy. The surgeon himself comes rushing out. Pramila break out in sweat. He calmly says, "Nothing to worry, Aunt, (the familiarity because his wife and Pramila's son were batch mates), one of his kidneys has ceased to function. We'll take care of it." At least, that is what I recall him saying. My memory of that moment, I think, can be pardoned for being a bit blurred.

THE MOST HUMOROUS MOMENT:

When the four-year-old remarked, "No kidney, great, he will never ever need a restroom again."

THE MOST DISAPPOINTING MOMENT:

When after almost thirty hours of nil by mouth period, the dietician's staff comes with tender coconut water and the nurse comes rushing in to stop him. Some potassium levels are elevated, so no bananas and no coconut water; here was this big gap between the cup and the lip.

THE MOMENT OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN THE MEDICAL

FRATERNITY:

When the oncologist calls up the histopathologist, and, in our presence, begins with a torrent of abuses ranging from who gave him or her medical degree and at what cost and whether he was watching a movie or actually looking at the slide through the microscope while preparing the report. “I know what I saw, you xxxxx, and your report does not reflect it,” so the conversation went.

THE MOMENT OF LOSS OF FAITH IN THE POWERS THAT BE:

When the surgeon’s Registrar comes and says the stent debris could not be removed because they do not have a flexible-URS, and with the rigid one, they cannot negotiate the spine, the only way is to come again after three months.

THE MOST FRUSTRATING:

In spite of running back and forth a dozen times, the staff at the nursing station seemed unmoved. This was about the vomiting, green stuff, much like in the movie ‘Exorcist’ for the third day running. Green bilious vomit caused by the pain medication. They decided to avoid the pain medication to be freed from the vomiting bouts.

THE MOST DISGUSTING TIME:

When it takes ten working hours for the bill to be prepared from the time the discharge orders are written.

THE CONFIDENCE BUILDERS:

The scores of FB comments and a few from Twitter kept our hopes alive.

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