

I feel like I'm giving up by pursuing professional caregiving for my mother with cancer. How can I address this?



Deborah Pausig, Bereavement coordinator at the VNA Community Healthcare & Hospice and author of *An Affair Worth Remembering With Huntington's Disease*, Guilford, Connecticut. *Photo courtesy of Deborah Pausig*

DEBORAH PAUSIG: This question is something I asked myself as a primary caregiver for my husband, who had Huntington's disease. Though not cancer, Huntington's disease is a rare, inherited disease that causes the progressive breakdown of nerve cells in the brain ultimately resulting in the need for full 24/7 care. The course of his illness was long and difficult. During the last seven years of the disease, my kids were 8 and 10, and I was working full time. I needed help, but I refused it because I thought I could do it all, to my detriment. I suffered caregiver burnout and learned a huge lesson. By the grace of God, I recovered with therapy and support and by allowing others in.

Many caregivers think that they alone can give the best care for their loved one. But what is not realized is how much it takes away. Many people take such good care of a loved one that they let themselves fall by the wayside. If I could do it again, I would ask for help earlier, but I needed to learn it myself. After my husband died, my mother was slowly dying with cancer. During her last months of life, I made a big decision: to be her daughter and not her caregiver. It made all the difference in the world. I could be with my mom as her daughter to enjoy the simple things in life like rolling cookie dough into balls. We had quality time together because I didn't have to worry about the personal care aspect. It brought joy to our relationship.

When you are looking for a professional caregiver, trust is an important factor. I didn't know about home care agencies and had to do some research. Ask around. Word of mouth referrals often are the best way to find good care. Think about what it is that you need. Does your loved one need a companion or someone to run errands? Do they need help with dressing and bathing? These are different levels of care that require different certifications.

You'll want to know how professional caregivers are vetted and whether they are insured. Check the turnover rate in the agency. Find out how their employees are trained. Once you find the right agency, you will have peace of mind, and that's a beautiful thing.

This isn't an easy decision, but the most important takeaway from my own experience has been the relationship piece. Bringing in professional help will free you up to be the spouse, the partner, the parent or the child, and not the caregiver. It can help you to retain the relationship you have and make the most of the time that you have with your loved one.

PURSUING PROFESSIONAL CARE // [National Association for Home Care & Hospice](#) has a checklist of questions to ask home care providers. // [Cancer.net](#) says that looking for professional help is a sign of strength, not weakness. |

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