

September/October 2021

THE GRAPEVINE

North Shore Caregivers Newsletter



CAREGIVER MENTAL HEALTH

Written by Melissa Wade

COVID-19 has posed significant challenges and barriers to both social and practical support for family and friend caregivers. Strong social support plays a vital role in mental health and caregivers are more at risk for both social isolation and mental health challenges. According to the family caregiver alliance, "studies consistently report higher levels of depressive symptoms and mental health problems among caregivers than among their non-caregiving peers." Research also indicates that "40 percent to 70 percent of caregivers show symptoms of depression and a quarter to half meet the diagnostic criteria for major depression."

Caregiver Mental Health cont.

Anxiety among caregivers is common as well. Knowing the early warning signs for depression and anxiety, and knowing when to reach out and who to reach out to for support, is vital for caregivers. Additionally, making time—even just a little—for social support can help improve your mental health. However, sometimes the kind of support we need exceeds what can be provided by friends, family, support groups and other social supports.

Below are some signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety provided by the The Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA:

Signs and Symptoms of Depression in Caregivers

- Avoiding pleasurable or meaningful activities because you feel guilty about taking time off from caretaking
- Repetitive nightmares or intrusive thoughts about the patient/loved one, including the diagnosis, treatments, or future prognosis
- Inability to sleep
- Feelings of exhaustion, severe tiredness
- Feelings of tension
- Inability to concentrate or remember details
- Anxiety attacks about not properly following the medical regimen
- Inability to talk to others about your experience as a caretaker
- Anticipatory anxiety about future treatments for the patient/loved one
- Inability to enjoy activities you once found pleasurable
- Thoughts of suicide because you feel so overwhelmed, worthless, or inadequate
- Chronic irritability

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety in Caregivers

- Constant fearfulness, worry or impending doom
- Depression that lasts longer than two weeks
- Trouble eating
- Shortness of breath that keeps coming back
- Sleep problems
- Heart racing or beating hard in the chest
- Constant irritability
- Excessive sweating

If you find yourself in crisis, please contact the crisis line or go to emergency.

If you are looking for mental health resources, below are some local resources for yourself or someone you are caring for. However, it is important to speak with your GP if you, or the person

you are caring for, are experiencing any changes in your physical or mental health.

Crisis Lines

Crisis Line Association of BC

In Crisis? Call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) to speak with crisis line workers anytime of the day or night.

Looking for information and support? Call 310-6789 to reach the Mental Health and Information and Support Line, from anywhere in the province. You will receive emotional support, and information on appropriate referral options and a wide range of support relating to mental health concerns.

Consult with a nurse and receive system navigation support:

HealthLinkBC

Anywhere in BC: 8-1-1

TTY (Deaf and hearing-impaired): 7-1-1

HealthLink BC helps you learn about health topics, check your symptoms and find the health services and resources that you need for healthy living. Call 8-1-1 to consult with a nurse, pharmacist or dietitian or visit HealthLinkBC.ca for easy access to help you find the health services you need, closest to where you live.

Translation services are available in over 130 languages on request.

Vancouver Coastal Health: Mental Health Services on the North Shore

Older Adult Mental Health Program - North Vancouver

North Shore Adult Community Psychiatric Services - HOpe Centre

Free and low-cost counselling and wellness programs:

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) North and West Vancouver offers low-cost, short-term counselling to adults living on the North Shore:

<https://northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca/programs-services/counselling/>

The CMHA also offers a variety of services including social support groups and wellness programs such as art therapy and meditation.

<https://northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca/>

More CMHA resources and tips:

[Improving Mental Health \(cmha.bc.ca\)](https://northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca/)

Wellness Together Canada provides a range of free services from basic wellness information, to one-on-one sessions with a counsellor, to participating in a community of support.

<https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>

Check out this website which has a small database of low-cost or free counselling on the North Shore:

<https://www.opencounseling.com/british-columbia/north-vancouver>

[We're here to help](#) | [Here to Help](#)

Whether you are navigating a mental illness or substance use problem, interested in taking steps to improve your mental health, or simply want to learn more, it's easy to feel overwhelmed or confused by all of the information out there. Find information you can trust on staying well, improving your mental health and well-being, mental illnesses and recovery, safer substance use, and recovery from substance use problems. These resources can help you take charge of your mental health, make informed decisions, and use different strategies to make meaningful change

If you need further assistance with navigating local mental health resources or any other resource support, please contact: Melissa Wade, Caregiver Support Program Coordinator: Melissa.wade@nscr.ca or 604-982-3320



Sources

[Caregiver Health - Family Caregiver Alliance Caregiver Mental Health | Anxiety and Depression](#)

[Association of America, ADAA](#)

[Crisis and Information Lines - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

[We're here to help](#) | [Here to Help](#)

Self-Care Spotlight: Self-Compassion



Self-compassion is one of the greatest forms of self-care. Self-compassion involves treating yourself as you would treat a good friend. According to self-compassion expert, Dr. Kristin Neff, there are three elements of self-compassion:

1. Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment

- Treating yourself with warmth and understanding.
- Recognize that no one is perfect and be kind to yourself when you make a mistake or experience challenges in life.

2. Common humanity vs. Isolation

- Recognizing that all humans experience suffering and that you are not alone in your painful life experiences nor is suffering your fault.

3. Mindfulness vs. Over-identification

- Relating your experiences to others who are also suffering.
- Allowing emotions and negative emotions to exist and not denying them.
- Observing negative thoughts and emotions with openness and without judgment.

If you want to explore more about self-compassion, check out Dr. Kristin Neff's website: <https://self-compassion.org/>

This website offers guided meditations for self-compassion, self-compassion exercises, and resources.

If you want to explore self-compassion and mindfulness in a structured way, you can access this course for free: Maintaining a Mindful Life

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/mindfulness-life>

Source: <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/#:~:text=Self%2Dcompassion%20entails%20being%20warm,flagellating%20ourselves%20with%20self%2Dcriticism.>

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

THURS 02

**MEN'S GROUP ON ZOOM
(REGISTRATION REQUIRED)
TIME: 1:00-3:00PM**

**PLEASE CONTACT PAT
DEAN TO REGISTER:
P.DEAN123@HOTMAIL.COM**

TUES 07

**ONLINE CAREGIVER
MEETING (DROP-IN)
TIME: 6:30-8:30PM**

THUR 16

**BEREAVEMENT GROUP
11:30 -1:00 PM**

**TO REGISTER CONTACT:
MELISA WADE
MELISSA.WADE@NSCR.CA**

MON 20

**PERSIAN CAREGIVER
MEETING ON ZOOM
(DROP-IN)
TIME: 4:00-6:00PM**

**TO REGISTER CONTACT:
MELISA WADE
MELISSA.WADE@NSCR.CA**

OCTOBER EVENTS

TUES 05

**ONLINE CAREGIVER
MEETING (DROP-IN)
TIME: 6:30-8:30PM**

THURS 07

**MEN'S GROUP ON ZOOM
(REGISTRATION REQUIRED)
TIME: 1:00-3:00PM**

**PLEASE CONTACT PAT
DEAN TO REGISTER:
P.DEAN123@HOTMAIL.COM.**

THURS 14

**BEREAVEMENT GROUP
11:30 -1:00 PM**

**TO REGISTER CONTACT:
MELISA WADE
MELISSA.WADE@NSCR.CA**

MON 18

**PERSIAN CAREGIVER
MEETING ON ZOOM
(DROP-IN)
TIME: 4:00-6:00PM**

**TO REGISTER CONTACT:
MELISA WADE
MELISSA.WADE@NSCR.CA**

A Letter to My Mum About a Tale of Two Caregivers: A Rocker and A Writer

Written By C.A. Bryson



Dear Mum,

Did you know that a caregiver (he was a rocker, a musician) spent two years in prison recently for allegedly, 'failing to look after' his ailing mother? Yes, it's true. It really happened. But first let me begin by saying that although it has been one year since you passed, I think about you all the time. And I think you'll agree with this quote by Carolyn A. Brent, author of 'A Caregiver's Companion' (2015):

'Looking back, I do not regret the decision to be my father's caregiver. I did it for love... even so, it was exhausting. It took a very real toll on my body. The moral of the story is: to be an effective caregiver, you must also take care of yourself.'

Wouldn't you agree? You taught me so much—as a teacher, as a human being. Yes, about being polite and respectful, but also, about anger. Because I did feel a lot of anger in those days. I worked hard to care for you and Dad for so many years, and I felt so tired, and above all, so invisible. But I learned to hold in my anger, and co-exist with it, to befriend it. And for that, I thank you.

No, I do not regret the years I spent looking after you and Dad. Dad is, as always, amazing, ever the poet. And your two other children are very kind to me—the older with her time and energy and the younger with bi-weekly long-distance phone calls.

But those were difficult days, were they not? You were so courageous, and the pain must have been unbearable. The truth was, you were very sick, but that's your story, and I'd like to respect your privacy.

You said you hated the hospital. Remember the Christmas night 2019 when I phoned the First Responders? They seemed like angels sent from heaven to me, because I knew you needed help, badly. Do you forgive me for calling them? I'm sorry the hospital soon became your new home. You always did love home, I don't blame you, I'd feel the same way. But it was my home too, right? For so many years, still is.

But you know, this may sound like a cliché, but there comes a time when you just have to let go. And, as someone once said:

'If you have anybody in your care, be it a child, a contemporary, or an [older] adult, you should not have a moment's hesitation if urgency arises. Get proper medical attention.' And now back to the tale. A tale worth telling for all of us that are lucky enough to call ourselves 'caregivers.' I'll tell you what happened: caregiver Mr. Ron Siwicki, as I mentioned above, spent two years in

prison for allegedly, ' failing to look after' his ailing mother. (The Caregiver's Burden' by Shannon Vanraes, Globe & Mail, Saturday May 15, 2021.)

Just as Pema Chödrön said:

'Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think the point is to pass the test or overcome the problem, but the truth is that things really don't get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. The healing comes from letting there be room for all this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.' (1996)

'Room for grief', wise words, wouldn't you agree?

'According to a 2020 study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), nearly 67,000—or one in three—unpaid Canadian caregivers, mainly family members, said they felt distress, anger, depression, and as though they were not able to continue their care activities.' (Globe & Mail, see above).

But Mr. Siwicki's friends and loyal supporters, according to accounts in public media, rallied to his side and helped him deal with the situation that had apparently, completely overwhelmed his ability to cope.

As for me, I'm almost an older adult myself. (I know you would prefer the term 'older adult' to 'senior.' Wasn't it you who helped draft the Patient Bill of Rights at Lion's Gate Hospital during your stint there as volunteer Chaplain? You gave so much of your time and energy to people who were grieving, both for themselves, and their loved ones.)

And I think you'd be proud to know that for the last seven years I've been a volunteer blogger for the Caregiver Support Program at NSCR (North Shore Community Resources), and that it feels good to give back. I even have a Caregiver Coach (who admits she doesn't like to cook, whereas with me, it's sort of a mixed bag. But not with you Mum, you were a great cook, truly superb.) And your two elder children are themselves extraordinary, each in their own way.

In those terrible years when you were so sick I learned from you that I can get through difficult times with a quiet abiding strength, and that is a great gift Mum, it truly is. It prepares me for the difficult years ahead, yet let us not also forget, the joys as well. This insight reminds me of that poem Dad likes to recite, you know the one that goes: 'Abide with me/Fast falls the eventide/When darkness descends/Oh Lord with me abide/When helpers fail/And comforts flee/Help of the helpless/Abide with me.'**

Did you know, last summer I made a pilgrimage to your final resting place? Of course, I couldn't go in due to COVID-19 restrictions but I was greatly comforted by the sense of peace and quiet about the place, and all those leafy trees. So grateful for the excellent care you received there. Take care up there and remember us down here just as we remember you, each and every day, along with your parents and siblings and your grandparents who left their legacy for us to follow. And it's not goodbye, Mum. Rather, it's 'au revoir'.

Your willing student (and sous chef),
C. A. Bryson

**Henry Francis Lyte 'Abide With Me'. (Compilation by D.M. Bryson 'Seven Songs of the Light and Dark'.)

Caregiver Spotlight: Pat Dean

What has been your journey into caregiving?

My journey began in 2003 when my wife was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. She was 54 years old. I was 55. I was to learn that Parkinson's Disease affects everyone differently. In Elle's case, her neurologist prescribed drugs and she was able to work until she was 58. Her company provided disability pension at full pay until she was 65. I retired in 2007. We made three decisions:

- a) To abandon thoughts of a sailboat - a passion we shared for years prior to her illness.
- b) We'd take a long dreamt-about 3-month vacation to New Zealand.
- c) We'd sell our house in North Vancouver and move to Vernon where we had extended family.

We did all three. Unfortunately, Elle's condition began to worsen in Vernon. She developed Truncal Dystonia, which is irreversible, caused her immense pain, forced her into a permanent stoop, and she began using a walker. I realized that if she was to receive the care she needed, a move back to North Vancouver was necessary. We left our beautiful walk-out rancher with a view in Vernon and moved into a two-bedroom "disability friendly" condo in North Vancouver. That is when my caregiving really began, and I started going to a Parkinson's caregiving group. We had an occupational therapist suggest additional movement aids and Elle stopped driving almost immediately. We found a neurological physiotherapist, a doctor at St Paul's that specialized in Dystonia pain, and began seeing her new neurologist, a mobility specialist. We also got a scooter. I continued to care for Elle at home.



However, her condition worsened, and in 2018 she went into an assisted living facility. It was ideal at first, but as her needs increased, she was transferred to residential care in 2020. She is receiving excellent care and I can visit her regularly as it's a 10-minute drive from our apartment.

What made you want to be a caregiver group facilitator?

I attended care groups in Vernon, Armstrong, and North Vancouver, most sponsored by the Parkinson's Society of BC. I also started attending a group sponsored by NSCR. It was my experience that the Parkinson's groups were excellent, but I was usually the sole male. Most of the people in the Parkinson's group were caring for spouses. My experience at NSCR was different. The group was attended by men and women who were caring for parents, children, siblings, and friends. I approached the previous facilitator last year and asked her if there was a men's group. The only one she could find was in Victoria; accessible by Zoom but a long ferry ride for in-person meetings. She suggested I start a group.

Caregiver Spotlight cont.

Tell us about your specific group.

After several meetings to discuss parameters, it was decided we would start in summer 2020. We did not limit it to any specific disability, but did decide the group would be solely for men caring for spouses, either at home or in care. We had two in-person meetings at NSCR, but then were limited to Zoom because of Covid. We currently have four members including myself but would welcome more.

What do you feel are some benefits to attending a caregiving group?

The benefits are almost endless. In addition to being able to express your thoughts and feelings in private to others who are in a similar caregiving position, each member has learned an incredible amount about their own individual journeys. Almost any question asked can be answered by other members or with NSCR's resources. The current professional NSCR facilitator is a huge advocate and resource asset for us, and we can call on professionals to address our group when the need arises.

How do you take care of yourself?

One of the main ways is by giving back. When you are caring for a spouse, it has been said that "you are neither married nor single." You are a caregiver, and you must constantly remind yourself that if you don't look after your physical and mental health, you cannot adequately care for your spouse. Meditation, exercise, eating well, and getting enough sleep all help. Maintaining a positive attitude is most necessary but often hard to do. I have found the compassion I've received from my caregiving groups helped immensely with this and is food for the soul.



NSCR Caregiver Support Program

201-935 Marine Drive, N. Vancouver BC V7P 1S3

We publish this bi-monthly newsletter on topics related to self-care and the caregiving role.

If you would like to learn more about NSCR's Caregiver Support Program, please contact Melissa Wade: melissa.wade@nscr.ca or 604-982-3320.