



Taking care of the caregiver—you

Why is it that the people who are the most caring toward others neglect their own needs? Have you noticed this?

I've seen it time and time again. The healthcare worker who's always the last to leave work, who always volunteers to work those extra shifts so patient care won't be compromised, who never says "No" when it comes to something a friend needs. These same compassionate and devoted clinicians seem to always worry about others and not themselves.

Recently, a personal friend who lives out of state contacted me with the sad news that his wife had died from an inoperable brain tumor at age 59. After swallowing my guilt for not keeping in touch with them better over the years, he related the emotional story of their last year together. He became her private hospice "nurse" and she died at home in his arms. He went on to tell me he'd neglected a serious health problem of his own over the last few years and now was seeking medical attention. His doctors told him his chances of surviving this invasive cancer were compromised due to his delay in seeking treatment.

I had to ask myself, "Did he really think his wife, my friend, would have been happy about the choice he made not to leave her side, which resulted in neglect of his own health?" I knew her well, and the answer is emphatically no.

What about your patients? How do you think they'd react if they knew you were neglecting your family, your financial security, or your health to care for them? The bottom line is this: When you take care of others, they care for you in return. You become their role model. Is your current self-neglecting behavior what you want your patients to model? Probably not.

If you can't learn to do the things necessary to take better care of yourself, then do it to honor those you care for—to respect their wishes. We all know the saying, "If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be there to care for others." Put yourself first and you'll be in a better position to care for others and model the behavior you wish to see in them. Caring—for ourselves and others—is what our profession is all about.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna Sardina". The script is fluid and cursive.

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