

CARESHARING: RETHINKING CAREGIVING AND CARE RECEIVING

Thoughts from a Workshop presented by Marty Richards, MSW

September 23, 2009

Caregivers come in all shapes and sizes: spouses/partners, sons/ daughters, family members, friends, neighbors, the young and old, and trained professionals. No matter how skilled a caregiver might be, caring for someone struggling with an illness, aging or disability can be difficult and overwhelming.

Marty Richards, noted author, social worker and gerontologist, spoke to these issues, when she led a workshop co-sponsored by the NW Center for Creative Aging and Senior Services on September 23rd. Sixty attendees listened to Richards and participated in hands-on exercises throughout the three-hour workshop.

What is Caresharing?

Marty Richards has been privileged to work with many individuals and families, who have taught her much about nurturing and sustaining people as they age. Speaking at a Parkinson's caregivers' retreat, she listened to the attendees, who were all spouses, stress the importance of sharing care between the one giving care and the one receiving care. Richards realized that this concept held true in all caregiving relationships. By changing our perception of care giving from a one-way relationship (I give, you receive) to a two-way approach, allows the "cared for" and the "carer" to share a deeper connection. In this view, each of us brings to the table our own set of strengths and the ability to teach each other. Richards noted, "Those who are "well" have much to learn from those who are "frail". The care receivers, no matter how frail or disabled, didn't get where they are today by being wimps. They are survivors and we have a lot to learn from them."

A Common Concern

"What will happen when I can't do this anymore?" is a caregiver's concern that comes up repeatedly in her workshops. Often caregivers have been so involved with giving care and so worried about the future, they do not take care of themselves and they become sick. The end result is that no one is helped. Richards' advice, which she admits to having difficulty following in her own life, is that "self-care is a necessity, not an option. To care for one another, you need to care for yourself. It is as simple and difficult as that."

Advice

When asked the most important bit of advice she would impart to a caregiver, Richards replied, without skipping a beat, "to remember that you are not alone, but also remember that people cannot read your mind. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength. No one walks the path alone."

Luckily, for those unable to attend this informative workshop, Marty Richards' has written, "[Caresharing, A Reciprocal Approach to Caregiving and Care Receiving in the Complexities of Aging, Illness or Disability](#). It is a very accessible book full of insights, wisdom, compassion and hope, worthy of being on anyone's bookshelf.