Stroke Caregivers Share ABCs of Caring

The poem below was written by a husband who cared for his wife after suffering a stroke. He created it after participating in a discussion group for stroke patient caregivers. Researchers examined the more than 2,100 e-mails of all the group participants and confirmed support existed for the word themes in the ABCs poem.

Stroke Caregiver’s ABCs

I have learned
A to ANTICIPATE, anticipate, and anticipate.
B to BEGIN in small steps so my wife is not frustrated by failing to achieve.
C to COORDINATE many people’s schedules, so that meetings can be made, doctors’ appointments can be kept, and I can go about my life, too.
D that caregiving is DEDICATED work. You can’t do it halfway.
E that caregiving is EMOTIONAL. Every emotion from love to hate, fear and anger, apathy and nurturing is in there.
F the meaning of FATIGUE. I am tired of being tired.
G to be GRATEFUL to all the people who have helped us, and who continue to look out for me and my wife.
H more about feminine HYGIENE than I knew before.
I to look forward to the research INTERVIEWER’S calls.
J to JUMP through more hoops than I care to write about and to JUGGLE all aspects of life.
K that stroke KILLS too many people and to be thankful that my wife was not one of them.
L that LOVE is eternal and it is the foundation of all this and with it we can do anything.
M about MONEY, how to spend it, save it, find it, fear it, and deal.
N that NEVER is an evil word and I don’t use it.
O to be OPTIMISTIC about the little things in life both for me and my wife.
P to be PATIENT, patient, patient—haven’t we all?
Q to fear QUIET, and to see if my wife is okay when I do not hear her. I have learned how to give QUALITY care and to recognize people of QUALITY when I see it.
R a new RESPECT for those who dedicate their lives to helping survivors and caregivers.
S to be more SENSITIVE to my wife’s emotions and to anticipate mood SWINGS. I have learned that caregivers can be really moody, too.
T to TRUST in God who loves me and my wife and who will give me strength to succeed and watch over all of us.
U to UNDERSTAND that I cannot control everything and I will never have it all UNDER CONTROL.
V the VALUE of this group and will miss it a lot.
W that caregiving is a WE thing and WE need each other in cyberspace and in real life.
X to XPECT anything and plan for the unexpected.
Y to appreciate the memories of YOUTH and to value what we can do today.
Z a ZILLION things.

Excerpted from the August September 2009 issue of Rehabilitation Nursing Journal.