



ELIZABETH SAGARIN

Raymond and Mary Hubschmitt have been a team in his fight against cancer and lung disease. After a blood pressure scare, she knew she needed to look after herself too.

When the **CARERS** need care

Advice on avoiding burnout,
fatigue and self-neglect

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY LIZA N. BURBY
Special to Newsday

Mary Hubschmitt, 74, of Mastic Beach, had a high blood pressure scare.

Francine Federman-Sherman, 72, of Hauppauge, gained 50 pounds.

Nadjamy Jean-Claude, 45, of Middle Island, walked out of her house, checked into a hotel and didn't come home for two days.

All three women were reacting to the impact of being long-term caregivers for their loved ones. Hubschmitt's husband has been battling lung

disease for 10 years and needs her help with all medical appointments. Federman-Sherman said she was unprepared for how rapidly her husband's early onset Alzheimer's progressed over four years. And for six years Jean-Claude said she has been juggling working full time and caring for her mother, who has dementia and lives with her, her husband and three sons.

They all said they remember the moment they realized the only ones they weren't taking care of were themselves — and that they needed help.

This pressure on caregivers is a growing problem nationwide. According to the 2025 "Family Caregiver Annual Report and Statistics" by SeniorLiving.org, an online resource for seniors and care-

givers, about 53 million U.S. adults are assisting their older relatives, spouses, friends or neighbors with daily tasks like cooking and dressing, transportation and medical or nursing tasks. The study also showed that 59% of family caregivers are women, and they report higher levels of emotional stress, depression and challenges with balancing caregiving duties compared to men who are also caregivers.

That tracks with what those who work with Long Island seniors are finding. "Caregiving here is something that is inevitably affecting all of us who are over 50, whether it's about our parents, our spouses, our friends or even ourselves," said Tara Anglim, vice presi-

See **CAREGIVERS** on E18



When Francine Federman-Sherman's husband, Glenn, moved to a facility, she joined a support group for Alzheimer's caregivers. He died in February, and she is still attending.

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Prepare now for the future

Families who aren't yet dealing with caregiving situations should have the hard conversations and begin planning now, said Tara Anglim, of the Caregivers Center at Northwell Health-Peconic Bay Medical Center in Riverhead.

She suggested talking about your wishes and getting legal documents like a health care proxy and a power of attorney.

"Can you ever be fully prepared? I don't think so," said Robyn Berger-Gaston, of Family Service League in Riverhead. "But one thing that we talk about with our clients is that it's better to have the conversation long before you need it."

ADVICE from those who know

CAREGIVERS from E17

dent of culture and experience at the Caregivers Center at Northwell Health-Peconic Bay Medical Center in Riverhead.

Among those needing care are 60,000 people on Long Island who are impacted by some form of dementia, including Alzheimer's, according to Lauren Vlachos, executive director of the Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center in East Islip. She said their needs will often eventually progress beyond what a family member is able to give them.

Other families are coping with Parkinson's disease and a wide range of other health issues that put demands on caregivers emotionally, physically and financially, said Gloria Lebeaux, senior director of social work services at the

Barry and Florence Friedberg Jewish Community Center in Oceanside.

As the complexity of care increases, so does the toll on the caregivers, said Susanna Caputi, the Link-Age Program coordinator at Family & Children's Association in Garden City, which connects seniors to long-term care services in the community. "There's always caregiver stress, burnout, fatigue and self-neglect; the feeling that 'I'm not allowed to take care of my needs because I really need to care for my significant other.' Caregivers tend to experience guilt and shame about even needing time for themselves and embarrassment that they need help."

A HEARTBREAKING HONOR

That's not surprising since most people aren't prepared to

handle it all, said Anglim, "though U.S. health care delivery — whether it's for a stroke, cancer or any other serious condition — is reliant on the idea that there are family members helping the patient."

That need doesn't make family caregiving easy, said Anglim, 54. "Being a family caregiver is a hard job, and it's a lot of responsibility," she said. "I've been a caregiver. When you love someone, you want to do everything you can to help them. It's really overwhelming, and we're not trained for that."

Caregiving is "a heartbreaking honor," said Robyn Berger-Gaston, division director of Family Service League Inc. in Riverhead. "Being the caregiver can possibly be the very most difficult experience that you feel honored to be able to do. It's the job that family members

don't want, but they don't want anyone else to do it, and that's kind of an interesting paradox for caregiving. What gets lost in the mix is taking care of yourself."

Jean-Claude said she certainly felt that way taking care of her 73-year-old mother, Anne Marie Charles, who has been living with dementia and Alzheimer's since 2017. She said cultural issues — her mother was born in Haiti — added to the expectation that, though she has brothers, as the daughter she needed to be the caregiver.

"In fall 2023 I was at my wit's end because I was emotionally burned out and I didn't know how to ask for help," said Jean-Claude, who works in real estate. "It caught up with me because the body can only take so much. I was juggling all these different hats as a woman



TOM LAMBU

Nadjamy Jean-Claude, above right, is a full-time caregiver for her mother, Anne Marie Charles, 73, who has dementia and lives with her. Jean-Claude said cultural issues added to the expectation that she, not her brothers, care for their mother.

Mary Hubschmitt, left, with the journal she keeps to document her husband's many medical treatments.



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and I had an emotional breakdown; just walked out of the home."

After that she and her family talked about how to make sure that didn't happen again. She said she reached out to officials at Family & Children's Association to attend virtual and in-person caregiver support groups, and they helped her find a day program for her mother three days a week.

"I had looked at everything from a negative way, but getting counseling and getting the support helped me to shift my thinking and now I'm even

looking at being able to create new memories with my mom," she said.

HELP AVAILABLE

And that support is readily available, said Vlachos, 47. "Even though it all sounds a little bit grim, there are a lot of different nonprofit organizations providing resources to caregivers," she said. "And while it could seem overwhelming to try to figure out where all of the resources are, if folks call us, we are happy to connect them to whatever they need."

For instance, Anglim said,

since navigating resources can be time consuming, social workers at the Northwell centers have vetted resource libraries related to their communities, as well as monthly hybrid education workshops and support groups.

Hubschmitt said she took advantage of their services. Eight years into their 18-year marriage, the second for both her and her husband, Raymond, he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Raymond, 80, has needed her help ever since to keep track of medical appointments. One year he had 100 of

them, so she carries a notebook to every appointment to stay on top of all his medical issues. Hubschmitt, a former school administrator who retired at 70 to care for Raymond, said when her blood pressure spiked during one of those appointments, she knew she needed to do something for herself. She joined the caregivers group at Peconic Bay Medical Center in Riverhead and attends workshops in person and on Zoom.

"It's brought joy and pleasure knowing there is a group for other people who are going through this as well," she said. "That you can go in and say, I'm feeling this way. Is anybody else feeling this way? And then to know other women are feeling the same. Now my advice to others is, 'Please take care of yourself.'"

A FOCUS ON SELF-CARE

Prioritizing self-care also took a while for Federman-Sherman, whose husband of over 30 years, Glenn Sherman, was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's in 2021. By New Year's 2022, "when he really was falling apart and becoming incontinent, I knew I needed help for me."

She contacted Family Service League for one-on-one counseling and a Zoom spouse support group. She said they even helped her find a day care center for her husband, as she was still working full time as an administrator at Farmingdale State College. When he had to move to a facility, she said she joined a related support group offered by the Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center. When he passed away in February, Federman-Sherman continued to attend her support groups.

"I needed them all. Everybody needs a way to cope. My way of coping was eating," said Federman-Sherman, who has since lost 40 pounds. "You need a support system. You need to come to terms with no matter what you do, you can't change what is going to happen. Don't get yourself sick because you love them, and it's ripping you up."

Lebeaux, 67, of the Friedberg JCC, advised that caregivers understand they don't have to go it alone. "There are places they can go, where they can feel heard, safe and accepted, and that talking to others is not depressing," she said. "It's a place to learn to problem-solve together, to share resources and to get some strength."

Free support for caregivers

There are many free support options available for caregivers on Long Island, including at local JCCs, libraries and places of worship. Below are just five of the available nonprofit programs. Lauren Vlachos, of the **Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center** in East Islip, said that to ensure comprehensive support for caregivers, they all collaborate.

The **Barry and Florence Friedberg Jewish Community Center** in Oceanside offers a wide range of programs and services for all ages, including social work services and virtual and in-person services for caregivers of family members with cognitive impairment and Parkinson's disease. These include referrals for financial and legal resources and information around planning and home care. Call 516-766-4341 or visit friedbergjcc.org.

Family & Children's Association in Garden City, which provides support for vulnerable Long Islanders, has programs for Nassau residents, including The Alzheimer's Caregiver and Dementia Support Program. Call 516-746-0350 or visit fcali.org.

Family Service League Inc., a social services agency that offers counseling, housing and employment services and is based in Huntington, has free individual and group caregiver support counseling for adult children and for spouses available by phone, Zoom and in person. They also have educational presentations on relevant topics such as elder law and Medicare. Call 516-406-1085 or visit fsl-li.org.

The **Caregivers Center** at Northwell Health-Peconic Bay Medical Center in Riverhead is one of six on Long Island that provides emotional support, education and resource navigation for family caregivers. Contact Tara Anglim at 631-548-6259 or visit pbmc.northwell.edu.

The **Alzheimer's Disease Resource Center** in East Islip provides care consultations, information and referrals, community education, support groups, life enrichment and therapy programs for caregivers and their family members living with all forms of dementia. Call 631-580-5100 or visit adrcinc.org.

— Liza N. Burby