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Thank You

Dear Friends of Hospice:

As we come to the close of another year, I want to take this opportunity to thank you, our hospice friends and foundation supporters. Without you we could not continue the mission of the California Hospice Foundation (CHF) which is to support quality hospice and palliative care through providing education to individuals and the communities who care for them.



It has been my great honor to serve on the CHF Board of Trustees for the past three years, and the Board of Directors of CHAPCA – the California Hospice & Palliative Care Association – for the past four years. During that time our focus has always been to increase awareness of our mission and to educate both the general public and the medical community about the importance of the work we do. Even as my tenure ends, I know my fellow Board Members will continue to strive for excellence in all they do.

Great goals and ambitions can only be achieved with strong partnerships, and we need your continued support and belief in what we do to achieve tremendous results. We truly appreciate your past support and look forward to a long partnership in the future.

Martin McDonough, PharmD, CGP, DAAPM
Chair, California Hospice Foundation
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If you or anyone you know has a need for Hospice Information and Referral services please call the California Hospice Foundation's toll free number: 888-252-1010

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Surviving the Holidays

If you're a caregiver or recently lost a loved one, the holiday season doesn't feel as merry as it used to. How do you balance responsibilities and emotions with the expectations of the season?

The key to coping is anticipating how holiday activities and traditions might affect you and your family, and finding an approach that feels right.

Discover the True Meaning of the Holidays

Holidays are a challenge for caregivers. The emotional and physical stress of taking care of a patient is compounded by nagging expectations of how things 'should' be done.

Some caregivers give up and decide not to do Christmas this year, a decision they usually regret. Others are determined to do everything the same as in years past. Or, if it's their loved one's last holiday, they're going to make it the best Christmas or Hanukkah ever. "They drain their own cups, doing what they 'should' do. Instead, simplify," says Cynthia Meilicke, Bereavement, Community & Allied Services Supervisor at the Hospice of the Foothills in Grass Valley.

Teri Collet, Director of Social Services at Community Hospice in Modesto, advises caregivers and patients to identify what makes the holiday special and meaningful and what can go by the wayside. "Don't stress out the patient by trying to do too much. If she's your mother, she still worries about you. You won't be able to share her last holiday if you're going crazy making cookies."

Build your holiday around those core components. Collet says, "If it's important to have a family Christmas Eve dinner with turkey and mom's famous pie, spend your time and money there, even if the market cooks the turkey. Mom can't make the pie herself, but perhaps she can teach you how."

Anticipate how to help the patient enjoy the season, for example, schedule special dinners for a time when she's more alert. Collet recommends asking your hospice nurse about adjusting medications and oxygen, or using portable oxygen packs, wheelchairs or walkers to help conserve energy.

Gifts for Caregivers

"Caregivers, be gentle with yourself," says Meilicke. "You're emotionally and psychologically drained. Think about your own self-care."

Amidst the seasonal hubbub, moments of calm reduce stress and recharge energy. Get away a few hours to get a massage, attend a yoga or meditation class, or take a walk. Meilicke says, "In this time of excess, be aware of your alcohol and sweets intake, eat nutritious food, get enough rest and ask for support."

"Caregivers are so accustomed to doing everything," says Collet.



"They have a hard time asking for help. Delegating the errands and housework isn't shirking responsibilities; it's maximizing the limited resources one human being can provide. It's more important to be there to talk with your loved one, than it is to clean the house yourself."

Friends and family are often willing to lend a hand, but caregivers don't always know how to ask for help. They don't want to burden friends with their problems. Meilicke advises friends to offer specific help. "Don't just say, call me when you need me. Be more specific: I'm cooking on Sunday. Can I bring an oven-ready meal to you? How does 3 p.m. sound?"

"Make it easy to accept," says Collet. "I'm going to Safeway, what can I pick up for you? Offer to take children to activities, send your housecleaner over, or stay with the patient for a few hours while they do a little Christmas shopping or go for a walk."

If you're missing a loved one, the holiday spirit doesn't quite fit. "Be reassured, it's okay to have moments of joy," says Meilicke, "but acknowledge that the holidays won't be the same."

Many families struggle trying to live up to an idealized version of Christmas or Hanukkah. Old traditions can be painful without the presence of a loved one. Meilicke advises discussing traditions with your family and keeping the ones that are most meaningful. "Children are the silent grievers," she says. "They need to see people be joyful; look for and find joy for them."

"It's a balancing act," says Collet. "Ideally, try a mix of new and old traditions. If you abandon all your old ones, it won't feel like Christmas, especially with kids. You can still have a tree, but if Dad always put the star on top, maybe Mom puts an angel on top instead."

Collet advises anticipating the moments that might cause pain or anxiety. Do you leave an empty place at the table? Do you put a photo or meaningful item there? Perhaps everyone takes turns sharing a Christmas memory of Dad, or, at New Year's, resolutions that honor his memory.

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Surviving the Holidays *continued*

Those who are grieving tend to isolate themselves during the holidays, not feeling up to social events. Meilicke recommends taking the pressure off by having a Plan A and B: be brave enough to say no, or, if you say yes, be realistic enough to cancel plans if you change your mind.

Seasonal Help

Hospices also offer extra support during this time of year -- free classes on dealing with stress and grief, support groups and bereavement counseling.

If you're caring for or missing a loved one, anticipate and plan for holiday challenges, and, most importantly, do only what's most comfortable for you and your family.

*Written by Deirdre Reid. Deirdre is a writer, blogger and association consultant at **Reid All About It** in North Carolina.*

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If you have a vehicle that you are thinking of trading in or selling, please consider donating it to the California Hospice Foundation's Donate a Car Program.



When your vehicle is sold, the proceeds will go to the California Hospice Foundation (CHF). You may also be able to deduct the fair market value of your vehicle as a charitable contribution for income tax purposes.

We have partnered with Car Program, which accepts most vehicles, including cars, trucks, trailers, boats and RVs. The donation process is easy by fax or by phone.

If you have questions or would like to learn more, please visit our website at www.cahospicefoundation.com or call us at (888) 252-1010