

# Caregivers need some care as well

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — It's a sunny day as Frederick J. Iekel and Joan Termini enjoy their beverages outside at a sidewalk cafe. But Iekel and Termini are here to talk about the clouds — clouds of stress that darken the minds of people called upon to care for others, from social-service clients to elderly relatives.

Caregivers can eventually suffer from "compassion fatigue," Iekel and Termini noted.

"They often don't give themselves the same kind of care that they themselves give," Iekel said.

Iekel is a board member of the Borromeo Prayer Center in Greece, and a parishioner at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, where the center is located. He's also a professional facilitator and trainer who works with organizations and governments on such issues as team building and customer service. Termini is a parishioner at Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, and a former social

## Health

worker.

Iekel and Termini hosted a workshop in April at the prayer center on "Compassion Fatigue," which the workshop defined as "a secondary stress for those who are emotionally and physically affected by the strain of long-term involvement in someone else's struggles." The workshop was designed for both professional and volunteer caregivers.

Compassion fatigue is an affliction than can "sneak up on caregivers of all kinds, Iekel and Termini noted, because caregivers face many daunting challenges. In particular, Termini and Iekel noted that caregivers are subject to losing their ability to empathize with people. Fulfilling the needs of an elderly parent with Alzheimer's can wear down a son or daughter; tending to the needs of patients can wear down a nurse or physician, they added. Compassion



Paul Finch/CNS

Martin Manaing embraces his wife, Lynn, at their home in Liverpool, N.Y. He is Lynn's primary caregiver while she grapples with Alzheimer's disease.

fatigue can cause health professionals, in particular, to reconsider their profession, Termini said.

"They become so emotionally drained that they become robotic — put the needle in, take the needle out — or they leave the profession altogether," she said.

Iekel and Termini noted that caregivers in danger of compassion fatigue may exhibit the following signs:

- A feeling of tiredness or dizziness
- Sleepless nights
- Stomach ailments
- Withdrawal from personal relationships
- Low morale at work and absenteeism from work
- Verbal abuse of trusted people in one's life

Compassion fatigue should not be ignored, Termini and Iekel noted, because it can lay the groundwork for such ailments as heart disease and a compromised immune system.

Caregivers, both professional and family, need to undertake a number

of actions to avoid compassion fatigue, Termini and Iekel said. Caregivers should allow themselves to take occasional respites from caregiving, they said, and not be afraid to ask for help. In some cases, caregivers may be wise to consider if ailing relatives need to be placed in a residence staffed by professionals, especially if the challenges of caring for ailing relatives become overwhelming, they added.

Workplaces that specialize in professional caregiving should provide times and places for employees to voice complaints, they said. Maintaining a sense of humor is also crucial, Iekel said.

Such organizations as the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Charities, or one's parish, may be able to link caregivers to services and programs designed to help them, Iekel and Termini added. Most importantly, caregivers of all sorts need to remember one thing if they really want to help others, Iekel said.

"You will be a good caregiver if you take care of yourself."

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