

# Cancer Caregiver Writing Study Invites Participants



University of Iowa News Release

## Family Caregiver Writing Study Invites Participants

For families who provide care to a loved one with cancer, stress and isolation can be a burden that's hard to carry. A University of Iowa researcher is conducting a study to see if older adults (55 years or older) writing about their thoughts and feelings about caregiving can be a strategy to help those family caregivers manage stress.

### **FAMILY MEMBERS**

Family members who provide care for cancer patients are asked to write for 20 minutes about their experiences related to their caregiving role every other day for six occasions. Participants in the study write in their homes or a place and time that is most convenient to them. Participants in the study do not need to be "good writers" or worry about spelling or grammar because it is the effect of the writing that is being studied.

### **PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

Howard Butcher, RN, PhD, Associate Professor of nursing and principal investigator of the Cancer and Aging Program funded study, will evaluate whether expressing stress and other emotions in writing is a helpful way to deal with the often difficult emotions of caring for a loved one with cancer.

### **A WAY TO DEAL WITH STRESS**

Written expression or journaling has been used with people who have experienced stressful and traumatic situations such as job loss, abuse, natural disasters, and loss of a spouse. The strategy involves participants writing about their thoughts and feelings. Previous research has shown that this type of writing promotes psychological and physiological health benefits that can last as long as 6 months. A previous study completed by Dr. Butcher with caregivers caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease found writing significantly reduced cortisol levels.

The studies have shown that writing helps trauma survivors make meaning out of their life circumstances. This cognitive process can result in physiological changes in the autonomic and immune system by reducing stress and facilitating coping.

### **INFORMATION**

For more information about the study or if you are interested in participating in the study, you can reach [Dr. Butcher at 319-335-7039](tel:319-335-7039).