Every November we celebrate Veterans Day, honoring the men and women who have valiantly served our Nation. November is also National Family Caregiver Month, a time to recognize and salute the many family caregivers who go “above and beyond the call of duty” and support our Veterans everyday. As no soldier goes into battle alone, no Veteran travels alone on the road of recovery from illness or injury. The presence of a competent and knowledgeable caregiver is a key factor of whether a patient’s health improves and whether or not they can remain at home or in the community.

More than three-quarters of a million Americans suffer a stroke each year and it is estimated that four out of five families in the United States are affected by stroke. This means that there is a great chance that someone you encounter today provides informal care for a loved one who has survived a stroke. Unfortunately, many caregivers of Veteran stroke survivors do not have the information necessary to help manage the stroke recovery process. They lack basic knowledge about strokes, ways to prevent complications and future strokes, and strategies to care for stroke survivors. In addition, stroke caregivers often do not know how to avoid caregiver burden and stress.

Resources and Education for Stroke Caregivers’ Understanding and Empowerment, or RESCUE for short, aims to provide helpful information about caregiving and its challenges to VA staff, Veteran stroke survivors, their family caregivers, and friends. The RESCUE name and life preserver logo, used throughout project materials, represent the idea that a caregiver is a “lifeguard,” responsible for the safety and well-being of those under their watchful care. Like a lifeguard, a fully prepared rescuer, ready to spring into action, needs the appropriate knowledge, training, and tools to successfully do their job.

Saving a stroke patient’s life takes teamwork. Healthcare providers use their knowledge, training and tools when they first treat a Veteran who has experienced a stroke. As the Veteran moves from stroke patient to stroke survivor, the caregiver’s role changes and they become an important member of the long-term care team. The RESCUE project’s goal is to “empower” caregivers by providing them information and resources they need to help their stroke survivor. This issue of the RESCUE Newsletter features several excellent resources that can educate and assist caregivers in how to take care of themselves and the Veteran stroke survivor.
American Stroke Association’s “Heart of Caregiving”

The American Stroke Association (ASA) has dedicated an entire section of their Web site, called For Family Caregivers, to address and support the needs of informal caregivers of stroke survivors. The “Practical Information” area provides helpful information to assist caregivers in taking the best care of themselves and their loved one. “Getting Support” offers resources such as a Stroke Support Group Finder and details about the Stroke Family Warmline, a team of two people who answer questions and lend a listening ear to stroke survivors and their families. “Caregiver Personal Stories” gives visitors a chance to read about the experiences of other stroke family caregivers, and “Caregiving Resources” has a list of links to organizations and programs for family caregivers.

“You can’t take care of your loved one properly without first taking care of yourself. Your physical and mental health care are of the utmost importance.” - American Stroke Association, Heart of Caregiving

Also located in the For Family Caregivers section is the Heart of Caregiving. This area contains eight categories of information specifically focused on the physical and emotional health of family caregivers. These categories include:

- Rights
- Rejuvenate
- Responsibility
- Replenish
- Reality Check
- Reach Out
- Refresh
- Resources


Visit the ASA Heart of Caregiving at:  http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3042552

MyHealthVet Spotlight: “Caregiver Assistance”

A caregiver is someone who takes responsibility for the care and well-being of another person while playing a role in certain parts of the care required. Caregivers may be a relative, significant other, neighbor, or friend. Whatever the caregiver’s relation may be, it is important that they learn about the condition(s) which may be affecting the person for whom they are caring and help them to make healthy choices so that they will be better able to help.

MyHealthVet, the VA Health Care Portal, has created a special area in the Healthy Living Center called Caregiver Assistance. In this area, visitors will find links to many helpful Web sites that cover topics such as:

- Caregiver resources for specific diseases and conditions and when to get additional help
- How family and friends can provide support
- Benefits of change, how to start healthy living, and special situations
- Understanding and tracking health behavior change progress using various tools available on MyHealthVet
- Complementary and alternative approaches

To access the Caregiver Assistance section of MyHealthVet visit http://www.myhealth.va.gov, then click on:

TAB AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE then click

Healthy Living Centers

then click

Caregiver Assistance
More than 50 million people per year provide informal care to a loved one or friend. For some, the role of caregiver develops gradually over time. In the case of a sudden illness, such as stroke, the person can become a caregiver overnight. Facing the daily responsibilities and stresses of caregiving can be overwhelming. This is especially true if the caregiver doesn’t know where to turn for help.

The RESCUE Web site currently being developed will provide information about a vast array of stroke and caregiving topics. Forty-three fact sheets have been developed and are grouped into seven categories to help the caregiver quickly locate the information they are seeking.

These categories are:

- **General Stroke Information**
  - Includes information on warning signs of stroke, the effects of stroke and prevention of a future stroke.

- **Getting Started**
  - Provides a starting point for the stroke caregiver on how to look for good information on the internet and how to communicate with the healthcare team.

- **Caregiver Needs**
  - Addresses the new roles and responsibilities that caregivers face.

- **Emotional & Behavioral Needs**
  - Provides information on helping the stroke survivor cope with emotional & behavioral changes.

- **Independent Living Needs**
  - Includes information on increasing the stroke survivor’s independence while still providing the help he/she needs.

- **Physical Needs**
  - Addresses the physical changes after stroke and safety measures that can help.

- **Community Resources**
  - Provides information on the local and state resources available and how to seek help.

The RESCUE Web site, [http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue](http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue), will go live mid-2010. Both the RESCUE Web site and fact sheets will also be available in Spanish.

**Next Issue’s Featured Article: "Social Support"**

**JOIN THE RESCUE TEAM IN PROMOTING STROKE AND CAREGIVING AWARENESS**

The RESCUE Project Team will be sponsoring promotional events during National Stroke Awareness Month (May 2010) and National Family Caregivers Month (November 2010). These events will take place in the lobby, primary care waiting area, library or canteen of 15 selected VA sites with a high prevalence of stroke.

Selected sites include:

- Augusta, GA
- Bay Pines, FL
- Chicago (Hines), IL
- Dallas, TX
- Houston, TX
- Indianapolis, IN
- Little Rock, AR
- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami, FL
- Milwaukee, WI
- Gainesville, FL
- San Juan, PR
- W. Palm Beach, FL
- Seattle, WA
- Tampa, FL
- W. Palm Beach, FL

Promotional materials will be distributed to participating sites and will include stroke caregiving fact sheets, an aphasia pocket card, a medication log pocket card, and RESCUE Web Site promotional items. If you are located at one of the VA sites above and would like to host an event, please contact Kim Findley at (352) 376-1611 ext. 4951 or email Kimberly.Findley@va.gov.
American Stroke Association - Heart of Caregiving
Sharing Your Heart

The suddenness of stroke and some heart conditions often allows no time to adjust to the shifting roles that these illnesses can cause. Caregivers may not be prepared to be responsible for another person — especially someone who might have been caring for them before. They might not even think of themselves as a “caregiver.” But if they are responsible for the well-being of someone who is even temporarily disabled by a debilitating disease, heart attack or stroke, they are a caregiver.

Caregivers are doing one of the most important and difficult jobs a person can do — giving care to someone they love. It’s the toughest job around, and it may make them sad, angry, tired, frustrated, depressed and sometimes lonely. But it may also be rewarding and fulfilling if they learn to pace themselves, seek help when they need it and, most importantly, take care of themselves first.

Did You Know?

- More than 50 million people, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend during any given year.
- Approximately 60% of family caregivers are women.
- 17% of family caregivers are providing 40 hours of care a week or more.
- 22% of family caregivers say they need help communicating with physicians.

Facts from the National Family Caregivers Association

African-Americans are 3 to 4 times as likely to have a stroke as European-Americans.

Learn how African-American caregivers can address the many issues that arise when they care for family members with stroke.

Visit www.strokecenter.org then click on the Patient & Families tab, then click on Stroke Family Caregiving for African-Americans.

Links in this Issue

DISCLAIMER OF HYPERLINKS: The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs or the RESCUE Project of the linked web site, or the information, products or services offered by this site. In addition, this site may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of the Department of Veterans Affairs. For other than authorized VA activities, the Department does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations. All links are provided with the intent of meeting the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the RESCUE Newsletter and forthcoming Web site. Please let us know about existing external links which you believe are inappropriate.

RESCE Web Site  http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue
VA My HealtheVet  http://www.myhealth.va.gov
ASA For Family Caregivers  http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3030377
ASA Heart of Caregiving  http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3042552
Internet Stroke Center  http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/index.html

Connie Uphold, Principal Investigator
Connie.Uphold@va.gov

RESCUE Newsletter Editorial Team:
Kimberly Findley, Kristen Wing, and Jini Hanjian. Graphic Design by Lindsay Knauff and Kristen Wing