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Sisterhood

BY JO CAVALLO

The sibling relationship is a uniquely shared family experience, and depending on the age of the siblings when a cancer diagnosis strikes, reactions to the disease can be vastly different.

“For adults, a cancer diagnosis of a sibling is far more personal and it’s much more threatening because of the closeness of the relationship and the shared genetic history,” says Les Gallo-Silver, director of clinical programs at CancerCare. “I don’t think children think of the disease in that way.” Since adult siblings feel more personally at risk, taking care of their sick sibling is almost like taking care of themselves, and regardless of whether they are younger or older than the ill sibling, they take on the parental role.

Carol Goldschein, 58, certainly credits her older sister, Sue Korn, with taking charge of her care when she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma six years ago.

“Sue found all of the doctors and came to the doctor visits,” says Goldschein. “One of the best things she did for me was to just let me talk. She called me every day and I probably said the same things over and over again, and where other people wouldn’t have the stamina to listen, she never grew tired.”

Korn says not a day is the same since her sister’s diagnosis. “I look at life and the preciousness of time differently now. My priorities have been reestablished,” says Korn. The sisters are now patient advocates, raising both awareness of multiple myeloma and badly needed research dollars. In May, the two helped organize a fund-raising event in New York City that raised more than \$360,000 for the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation.

“I feel like I’m not only making a difference for Carol, but for all multiple myeloma patients,” says Korn. “What drives me is that being her older sister, I’ve always felt a sense of responsibility for her. This is my little sister. I’m supposed to be taking care of her.”