

Caring for someone with cancer? Surprise, you're a caregiver

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This summer my cousin was diagnosed with testicular cancer. As this is my first experience with someone close to me being diagnosed with cancer, my mind was immediately filled with questions.

What does this mean? How should I feel about this? How can I help? It was the helping question that proved to be the most trouble. Because my cousin lives a few hours away and being a poor college student, I couldn't drive to visit him often as I would have wanted. Instead, I decided to help out by doing some of the things I do best--research and baking. I volunteered to be the family medical researcher and baked a huge batch of brownies I mailed to him overnight.

Does this mean I consider myself a caregiver? Not necessarily--but maybe I should. While working on the article "[I'm Not a Caregiver, Am I?](#)" I got the chance to interview people on how most caregivers don't see themselves as caregivers. What I discovered in working on that article is that most caregivers never label themselves as such. They're so focused on the action of taking care of someone that they never sit back and think about the role they've been thrown into. Sometimes it takes someone else (most likely the patient) to help the caregiver think about their new role.

The main revelation I took away from working on the article is anybody can be a caregiver. The role of caregiver is hard to define for people because it encompasses so many different activities--from occasionally offering assistance from afar to helping someone daily. I still find it hard to consider myself a caregiver. I mainly consider my part as doing whatever I can (no matter how small it might be) to help out. If that makes me a caregiver, then I guess I am one.

What I do know is that caregiving is something that touches everyone's lives whether they recognize the caregiving role formally or not.

I think Rosalynn Carter put it best when she said, "There are only four kinds of people in the world--those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."