

Rocky Mountain Conference on Aging Aging in the Workplace

Working it Out at Work: The Family Caregiver's Dilemma

Presenter Name: Sally Seggerman & Kim Yuskis

Presentation Date and Time: Wednesday, October 24, 2007, 11:00 A.M.

Sally and Kim presented results from a study they conducted, which was essentially an investigation into working caregivers. The surveys from their study focused on three specific questions: 1) Who are working caregivers? 2) Whom do working caregivers care for? 3) What do working caregivers need?

The presenters opened the forum up to discussion with workshop participants and the group discussed on related issues from both personal and professional standpoints.

1. The response rate in Sally and Kim's survey was very low, around 10%. They stated it was most likely due to the fact that working caregivers have less time to devote to filling out the survey. The typical respondent was married and employed and 60% were female. Fifty-percent of respondents were 45-60 years old. All working caregivers stated their care recipients had multiple ailments.
2. There is a changing culture in the workplace for caregivers. Fellow employees/employers and human relations staff need to listen to the needs of employees in a caregiver role and need to value those employees. The shift is a change in the paradigm in employment culture and acceptance of the role issue. Most caregivers who are in the workforce want more resources and referrals, flexible time in the workplace, an acceptance the caregiver role, and empathy among fellow employees/employers.
3. The impact on the workforce of not being flexible for working caregiver's results in the following: declining caregiver health, financial strain, and career derailment (reduced hours, leave of absences). Within the next five years, one-half of the labor force will be caregivers of older adults.
4. Working caregivers could benefit both directly and indirectly from more supportive services. The workplace can offer more of these and it would benefit companies in multiple ways, especially since such a high portion of the workforce will be in this role in the very near future. Such supportive services include: resources/referrals, flexible work schedules, benefits, training for managers and supervisors through training and education to increase understanding of and responsiveness to caregiver issues.
5. The culture in the office needs to be more sympathetic to staff with elder care issues. Educating the working caregivers themselves is important because caregivers need to realize that obtaining help from others is acceptable. Ideally, the educated working caregiver utilizes multiple resources and responsibilities can be more equally shared.

Submitted by: Carrie Seaverson, University of Northern Colorado, October 30, 2007