

**Statement by Scott Conner
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Chairman Deal, Congressman Brown, and Members of the Committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today before you on such an important issue. I commend you for your leadership in addressing the needs of the elderly in our nation, and specifically addressing the needs that caregivers face. I know that for many of us in this room, caregiving is an especially personal issue. And I know that I am very proud that the Red Cross plays a role in helping caregivers provide support and comfort to their loved ones.

I am also pleased to be here today because this hearing sheds light on an important program that the American Red Cross launched in 2004 to help better prepare individuals to provide caregiving services to their loved ones, as well as to train individuals to provide caregiving services.

For 125 years, the American Red Cross has been America's partner in preventing, preparing for, and responding to disasters. The American Red Cross is known from coast to coast for our response to more than 70,000 disasters annually, the vast majority being single family home fires. We have more than 800 chapters spread throughout the United States and the territories, and we provide the nation with nearly one half of the blood supply.

As important, the American Red Cross trains nearly 15 million Americans each year in lifesavings skills. From first aid and CPR, to AED training and babysitting courses, the American Red Cross is committed to preparing our neighbors for any disaster that comes their way. To that end, we established a program to prepare individuals on caring for the elderly.

Services to Seniors

Seniors are critical to the mission of the American Red Cross. In fact, seniors comprise a large percentage of our volunteers. But when seniors fall ill, 78% rely on their own family members to take care of them.

A 2005 study showed that 36% of Americans mentioned the American Red Cross first when asked what organization should be involved in teaching home nursing in case of a pandemic. This was 5 times as many people as the second most often selected organization.

For family members who are confronted with an unforeseen combination of circumstances that requires them to step in and provide care, the American Red Cross Family Caregiving program prepares them to respond. It is indeed a family emergency when a grown son or daughter finds themselves totally unprepared the day an elderly relative becomes sick. A busy and full life one day is taken over with caregiving responsibilities the next. For many days thereafter they may find themselves cleaning up hazardous environments, helping with personal care, and managing

medications. Recent research has brought to light that caregivers endure personal and financial hardships – trouble in their jobs and the decline of their own health and relationships. These are some of the same kinds of things the American Red Cross volunteers face in disaster situations. Training makes a difference.

Our Family Caregiving program prepares families to respond in a manner to prevent hardship and further injury, keep basic needs met, and keep their loved ones health stable under the guidance of the family doctor.

Lay caregivers need training to deal with life-threatening emergencies – infection control, administering medications, moving a sick person without doing further injury. In Family Caregiving we teach the emergency action steps (Check, Call, Care), responding to sudden illness, safe disposal of syringes, oxygen, medications, food safety, disposal of hazardous waste, and many other skills needed to keep people alive till the situation stabilizes.

History of the Family Caregiving Program

The program was developed with funds from a private donor – Josephine A. Osterhout – whose estate provided money to Red Cross National Headquarters to “help the elderly in America.” In 2001, before embarking on the Family Caregiving program, National Headquarters, in partnership with the National Caregivers Alliance and AARP, commissioned a national telephone survey of caregivers. We learned that 22 million households are caring for a sick or elderly loved one. We found that Josephine Osterhout was not alone in thinking that America’s elderly could be helped by the American Red Cross.

Our study also revealed that Americans see the American Red Cross as a logical source of information on Caregiving. It was generally felt that the American Red Cross had a good deal of experience, either directly or indirectly, with caregiving –

- Experience with Bloodmobiles transferred to developing transportation service for the elderly and disabled
- Disaster relief efforts transferred to developing a respite care program
- Experience as a trainer in first aid and CPR, the American Red Cross was seen as having the expertise to produce caregiver training materials.
- A reputation as being reliable and caring in an emergency would be a value in obtaining the trust necessary to have caregivers and their loved ones accept the services that the American Red Cross might provide.

Most adults receiving long-term care at home – 78% rely exclusively on family and friends to provide assistance. (Thomson, 2004, Georgetown University). Research has shown that providing care to elderly family members is a serious health risk for caregivers. Studies consistently find high levels of depressive symptoms and mental health problems among family caregivers as compared to their non-caregiving peers (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2003, L. Gray). The caregivers that provide the greatest level of care often experience the greatest financial burden, including lost wages and missed work.

Red Cross Programs that Train Caregivers

Family Caregiving

The American Red Cross Family Caregiving program offers nine modules that help participants provide better care and gain an understanding of safety, nutrition, general care, and legal and financial issues. Since each session is just one hour, the presentations can accommodate even the busiest schedules.

Our modular program design lets participants choose any presentation, in any order, and pay a nominal fee for only those they attend. No matter which presentations are selected, participants enhance skills, reduce stress and build confidence.

Topics include:

- Home Safety
- General Caregiving Skills
- Positioning and Helping Your Loved One Move
- Assisting with Personal Care
- Healthy Eating
- Caring for the Caregiver
- Legal and Financial Issues
- Alzheimer's disease or Dementia
- HIV/AIDS

In 2005 the American Red Cross delivered 18,000 Family Caregiving modules. The program may be delivered by any American Red Cross Chapter, by Authorized Providers, or by any senior serving organization or community based organization.

The Family Caregiving program is currently being expanded to reach more caregivers by developing new ways to reach out to them such as:

- New products: Our new Family Caregiving Reference Guide to be released later In 2006 – a skills reference book with a DVD that will be distributed in retail outlets in addition to the American Red Cross Chapters.
- Online programs to help train caregivers.

Nurse Assistant Training Program

American Red Cross had 12,000 nurse assistants enrolled in the Nurse Assistant Training program in 2005. The program meets all federal requirements and complies with state regulations for training nurse assistants. Additionally, it provides the participant with the knowledge and skills needed to appropriately care for individuals in the extended care setting as a nurse assistant.

The purpose of the program is to provide information and skills enabling nurse assistants to provide quality care for residents in nursing homes, as well as supplemental information and skills that will enable them to provide quality health care for clients at home.

Together We Prepare For Seniors

Together We Prepare is a program that includes presentations and materials provided by chapters to help seniors take key steps toward preparing for natural disasters and man-made emergencies. These steps include 1. Make a plan; 2. Build a kit; 3. Get trained; 4. Volunteer; and 5. Give Blood. For seniors, making a plan and building a kit are two key actions to prepare for all hazards.

Additionally, the Red Cross developed a targeted resource for seniors entitled the “Disaster Preparedness for Seniors by Seniors Guide.” Chapters often combine the Together We Prepare program with the Family Care Giving Program to provide basic preparedness information as well as skills for caregiving for seniors.

Other Senior Serving Programs:

Local American Red Cross chapters throughout the US offer a wide variety of services to seniors in their own communities such as:

- Lifeline – Lifeline® is a personal response and support services system for seniors and the physically challenged. It promotes independence, peace of mind and early intervention to those in need and for loved ones. This Personal Emergency Response Service (PERS) is available 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year.
- Transportation – Volunteers, many of which are seniors themselves, transport other seniors in need to medical appointments and other important trips.
- Shoppers Programs – volunteers helping those who are shut in by going to the store for them.
- Community Feeding Support and Meals on Wheels
- Friendly Visitor and Tele-Care programs – Volunteers who call each morning or pay a visit regularly to home bound, elderly and disabled seniors.
- Adult Day Care

Challenges and Growth Opportunities for Family Caregiving Program

Although 18,000 Family Caregiving presentations have been done in 2005, the American Red Cross has encountered challenges in implementing our Family Caregiving program. Some of the challenges include:

- Caregivers do not attend chapter delivered training.
- Initial low turnout
- Sizeable initial resource requirements
- Lack of grant funding to support initiatives
- Caregiver issues
 - Self-identification by Caregivers
 - Time constraints

Overview of Challenges

In general we have found that there is a reluctant market for Family Caregiving Skills. Caregivers do not self-identify, and do not have time to learn the skills of caregiving. Yet the “work” of training Family Caregivers is likely to become an important concern in the near future because 78% of long term care is done by the family caregiver. There are roles the Federal government can play to address these challenges, and that will help to create an environment that

expands family caregiving. Families providing a greater percentage of the care their loved ones need offers a humane solution to the long term care issue and goes a long way to helping solve the nation's long term care problems. But families cannot do it alone.

I encourage this Committee to consider three critical issues: first, a lack of awareness in communities across the country; second, the strains faced by caregivers with both limited resources and time; and third, the tremendous hardships of caregiving. We offer three promising steps that will lead to an environment where family caregiving can grow:

1. **Awareness:** Large scale health communications programs to raise awareness of rewards of caregiving and to encourage people to self-identify so they can get the help they need. Members of Congress can help promote caregiving programs in their local communities, and I encourage each of you to do so.

2. **Resources and Time:** Congress could consider public policy that encourages insurance companies and Medicare and Medicaid to help pay for family caregiving education for individuals, as well as requiring the healthcare industry to provide the training. Studies show that people prefer to get health information from their own doctors. Doctors and hospitals should prescribe caregiver education, however many health care providers will not recommend education unless it is covered by insurance. Diabetes education is reimbursed; as is childbirth education. It is time that we reimburse for caregiving education as well. Caregivers are an important component of the patient care team, and we ought to help insure that programs are available to meet the growing demand for caregivers in the United States.

3. **Lessening the Hardships of Caregiving:** Continuing to provide for growth of all manner of nationally supported services and programs for Caregivers such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program, FMLA and so many others. Congress should also consider economic support to families, be it through tax credits or allowing unreimbursable education costs to be deducted on federal taxes.

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Brown, I thank you again for the opportunity to be here before you today. On behalf of the entire Red Cross, I thank you for your leadership in addressing this difficult issue, and I can assure you that the American Red Cross stands ready to support any efforts to promote and expand family caregiving services and support. At this time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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