

OASIS Alert

Trends: ECONOMIC HARDSHIP FORCING FAMILY CAREGIVERS' HANDS

Expect big changes in caregivers' ability to tend to at-home patients.

When assessing the availability of assistance for your patients in M1100, you must take changes in caregiving status into account or risk inaccurate reporting. Family caregivers often provide their services without compensation. However, as economic hardships increase, many caregivers are being forced to return to the workplace -- leaving their loved ones without care, a recent study finds.

The Evercare Survey of The Economic Downturn and Its Impact on Family Caregiving found that family caregivers see a decline in both the care their loved ones receive and the care they are able to provide due to the current economic downturn.

Statistics: Fourteen percent of caregivers surveyed said the amount of care they have been able to provide for others has significantly decreased. As this necessary support for staying at home dwindles, more patients will have to enter hospitals or nursing homes. Consider these realities of the current economy (combined with the financial burden of caregiving):

- One in three employed caregivers have had to work more hours or get an extra job to cover their expenses, including caregiving costs.
- Half of working caregivers (50 percent) said they were less comfortable asking for time off from work to care for their loved one.
- One in eight caregivers (13 percent) is spending more to care for their loved one since the downturn began.
- 65 percent of caregivers who reported spending more to provide care said this increase has made it hard to pay for their own basic necessities, and 64 percent are struggling to pay their other bills.
- Nearly half of working caregivers (47 percent) said the increase in caregiving expenses has caused them to use up all or most of their savings; 43 percent have borrowed money or increased their credit card debt as a result.
- One in three caregivers (36 percent) said they have found that government agencies or non-profit groups are less able to provide services or outside help to their loved one; one in four caregivers said services or outside help for their loved one had been cut back. With family caregivers' ability to predict the amount of assistance they can provide changing, you must think in general terms when responding to M1100, says **Judy Adams**, president of Adams Home Care Consulting in Chapel Hill, N.C. "Family caregivers' is a broad term that encompasses family members, friends, and volunteers," she notes.

Bottom line: You can't expect that your response for M1100 will remain the same across all time points.

Ask specific, pointed questions at both start of care and resumption of care to ensure you accurately document the amount of assistance your patient can rely on.