

## **Caregiver Finds Help to Restore Balance in Life A Case Study in Overcoming Depression**

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Debra is a 54-year-old woman who came to The Guidance Center because she suffered from depression. She reported that she had virtually no appetite, no energy, hopelessness, fits of crying, pleasurelessness, confusion, difficulty sleeping, and a feeling of wanting to die, though no plans of harming herself. These symptoms began when her mother-in-law passed away 3 months prior due to pneumonia that was exacerbated by her Alzheimer's. Debra was the primary caretaker for her mother-in-law, tending to her every need, from cutting her nails, feeding her, bathing her, cooking for her, and companionship. Debra fulfilled this exhausting role at the expense of her job and family.

In the last days when her mother-in-law's death was imminent, the family was gathered to say their goodbyes, and Debra's sister-in-law accused her of poor caretaking and as being a contributor to her death because of her mother-in-law's refusal to eat in the last days at her home. Debra absorbed the accusation, but the words penetrated her soul, complicating her grief process after her mother-in-law died. Debra's caretaking efforts were now being impugned, and her efforts were severely diminished.

A treatment plan was devised with Debra to improve her self-esteem, improve her communication skills to advocate for herself, and allow her to openly grieve her loss. Debra knew she wasn't at fault, but the words hurt her and provoked guilt, so the treatment focused around Debra reminding herself about the tremendous efforts she did to take care of her mother-in-law, alone, and focusing on the words of her mother-in-law rather than her sister-in-law, as she was told by her mother-in-law that she was special for her kindness and love. Debra also wrote her positive traits on post-it notes and posted them in strategic spots in her house to remind her of her strengths. Debra was also counseled on using communication techniques that would allow her to confront her sister-in-law in a forthright manner, sharing how her statements had hurt her and how erroneous they are. Debra was referred to yoga and meditation classes, and her involvement in these trained her on how to de-stress when those negative messages would be played in her head. Debra began to sleep better and more consistently, immensely improving her outlook. Debra was also able to use new communication skills to discuss with her husband how he could be helpful to her, and she was not accustomed to being taken care of as she had always played the role of caretaker at the expense of her own needs. Debra also was able to put words to her grief: loss, abandonment, loneliness, guilt, anger. Just speaking about these released the tension she was holding.

Debra's improvement showed in just 2 sessions, and she completed her treatment in 6 sessions, with the aid of outside yoga and meditation classes. Debra's case shows how caretakers can suffer enormously in caring for their ill loved one, and only realize the true extent of what they did after their loved one has passed, and how they, too, have needs to be attended to.