

Advocate Reveals Three Reasons Why Caregivers Need to Give Themselves A Break

by Sharon Brothers

Being trapped in a dead-end job with a lousy boss and low pay is still not as stressful as being a caregiver to a loved one.

That's the opinion of one social worker who has nearly two decades of experience working with caregivers and their families. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, more than 65 million Americans are caregivers to family members with a vast array of illnesses – including Alzheimer's disease, advanced diabetes, Parkinson's disease and many others – and the hardest thing for these people to do is to give themselves a break.

"When you have a bad job in a toxic workplace, you feel trapped, but you can always try to find another job," said Sharon Brothers, a veteran social worker who is now executive vice president of Caregiver Village (www.caregivervillage.com), an omnibus Internet community and resource hub for caregivers that includes expert forum hosts and even an online caregiver game. "Caregivers, however, can't just find another role. They are caring for a loved one, so the stress they live with is real and the boss they report to is themselves. They feel trapped by their love and obligation to their family members, which makes it exponentially more difficult for them to get a break,

because they feel guilty whenever they try to take one. In fact, studies show that being a family caregiver is one of the most stressful 'occupations' in the country today."

What compounds the problem is that many caregivers also still have to work a regular job in order to make ends meet. Trying to balance a career and caregiver work simply compounds the stress. Additionally, they cost businesses in the country more than \$33 billion in lost productivity, according to an AARP study, which makes job security an additional source of stress.

"Most caregivers are adding this role on top of their work, their children, marriage and other commitments. Just finding time for a break can seem impossible, given the increased demands on an already busy life," she added. "That's even more reason why they need to find some time, even if it's just a few hours each week, to make time for themselves so they can decompress even just a little." Brothers' reasons for this include:

- **Your Stress is Your Loved One's Stress** – While caregivers have to help family members with their illnesses, they don't realize that stress is an illness, too. Moreover, when they are stressed out, they won't be able to function at their peak, resulting in a

reduced ability to provide care. A little down time will go a long way to keeping the household calm. It may even allow the caregiver to continue to provide care for years longer into the future.

- **Guilt Creates Resentment** – Feeling guilty about taking a little time each week to decompress will only build up a hidden resentment toward the one you are caring for. That resentment can become toxic, and can defeat the purpose of caring for that person in the first place, because neither you nor they will be happy.
- **You'll enjoy caregiving so much more** – Taking a break will give you a renewed sense of energy and purpose, helping you enjoy caregiving even more.

Your loved one will sense your increased enjoyment, too. No one wants to be a burden; increasing your enjoyment in caregiving means your loved one will feel more valued and less of a burden to you.

About Sharon Brothers

Executive Vice President of Caregiver Village, Sharon Brothers, holds a Masters Degree in social work from the University of British Columbia. She built and managed some of the very first specialty care centers for people with Alzheimer's and dementia in both Washington and California, and has more recently developed an e-learning company for caregiving professionals. She works with family caregivers both in Caregiver Village and in her leadership of a family support group for her community hospital.

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While resistance to international poaching is high within the organizations that represent the nursing profession in Canada the issues are far from being resolved. The nursing unions in Ontario have taken a clear position against poaching and the Canadian Nurses' Association endorses the International Council of Nurses position in support of ethical recruitment. At the same time the poaching of Canadian nurses by American hospitals continues unabated.

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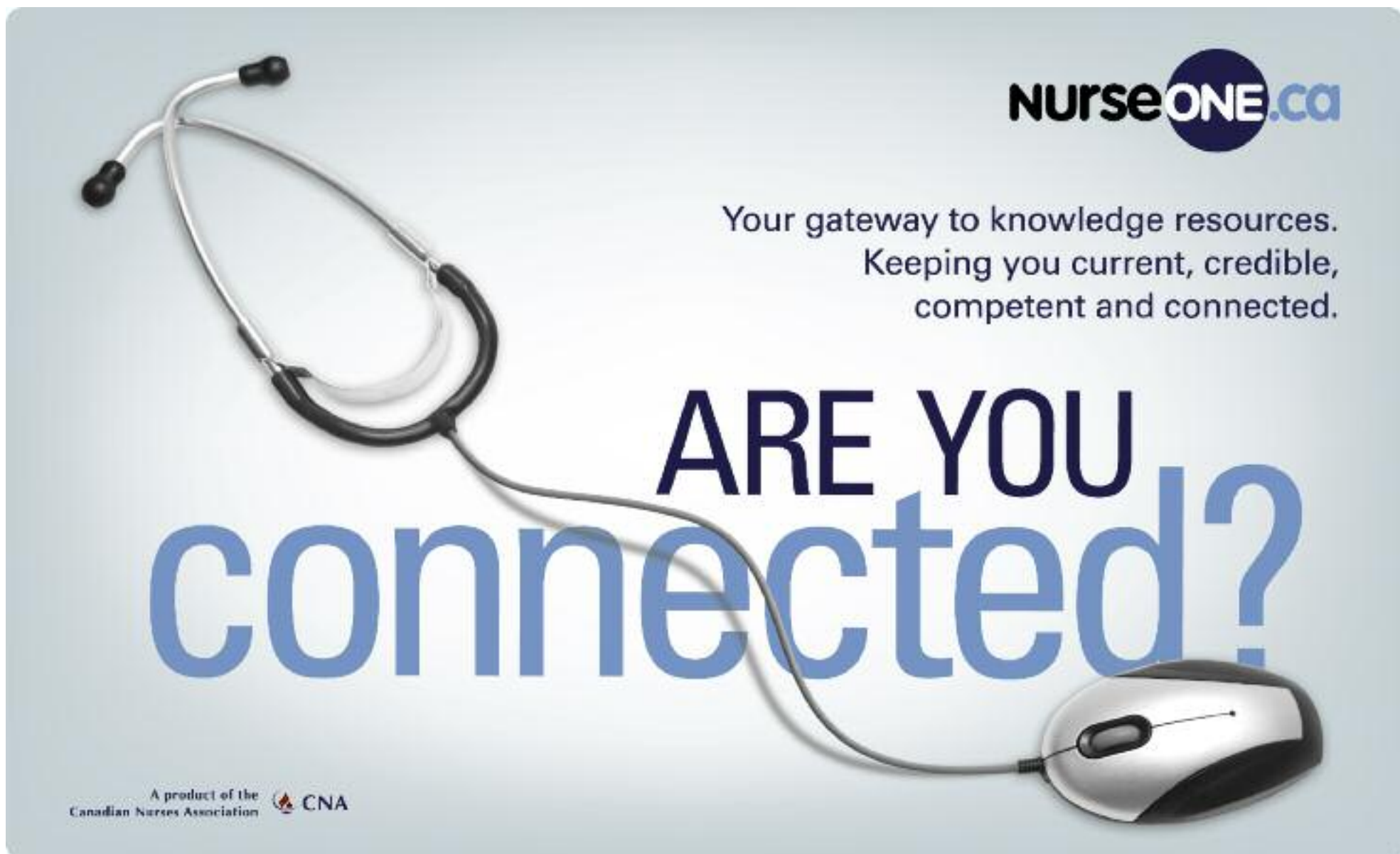
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