Connecting with

THE CHRONICALLY ILL

Your Place in the Picture

“As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has—or ever will have—something inside that is unique to all time. It’s our job to encourage each other and to provide ways of developing it’s expression.”

--Fred Rogers

Who are the chronically ill?

Individuals with long-lasting or recurring illnesses for which there may be no cure. The chronically ill are everyday people who look like you and me. On some days, they are capable of great and astounding things and other days some struggle to get out of bed. The Center for Disease Control estimates that one-half of the people in the United States suffer with a chronic illness. The number increases to 80% for those who are elderly. Based on those statistics, many of us have someone in our lives who is experiencing chronic illness. And most of us will personally experience chronic illness sometime in our life.

How can I better understand chronic illness?

Picture yourself in their place from their perspective. Imagine you have the flu. For a day. For a month. For a lifetime. How would you feel? Would you become discouraged, frustrated, lonely, or grieve about what you could no longer do? Would it be difficult for you to accept help? How would you want to be helped?

I am just one person, how can I make a positive difference?

What is my place in the picture? Those who are chronically ill suffer physically and emotionally in ways that most healthy people may not recognize or understand. It is often difficult to know what is needed and how to provide it. Pray first to know what the Lord would have us do. When we rely upon the Lord to guide us, we can go forward with confidence, trusting that opportunities and means will be provided.

Get to know those with chronic illness as friends, not as a sick person. The better you know them, the more likely they will be to open up to you, and you will learn what they really need help with. We can follow Sister Linda K. Burton’s advice: “First observe, then serve.”
We tend to remain silent when we don’t know what to say. Our silence fosters disconnection. Create positive connections by saying something such as:

*It’s good to see you.*

*I am glad you are here.*

*I don’t know what to say, but I want you to know that I care.*

**Learn about the person and their condition.**

It is better to ask sincere questions than to pretend that nothing is wrong. The picture you see on the outside may not accurately reflect what is going on physically or emotionally on the inside.

*Develop a relationship over time and seek to learn more with each contact.*

*Learn what their talents, interests, and dreams are. Learn what their frustrations and challenges are.*

*Show charity and respect by being non-judgmental.*

*Look into their eyes as you listen; some things are communicated without words.*

*Make your visits short, unless you are invited to stay longer, so that you do not tax their strength.*

**Offer Specific Help.**

It is difficult for anyone to ask for help and the chronically ill are no different. You can make it easier for them to accept your service when you make it a part of what you are already doing.

*I am going to the store, what can I pick up for you while I am there?*

*I made soup for dinner tonight. I’d love to bring some over for you and your family.*

*I would love to do some dishes or fold some laundry while we chat.*

*My son is mowing our lawn today, is it all right if he mows yours, too?*

*“Thee lift me, and me lift thee, and we’ll both ascend together.”*  
*--John Greenleaf Whittier*

*“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour...For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”*  
*--Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*
**Look for ways to include the chronically ill.**

Remember that the chronically ill want and need to be valued as contributors. They still have many gifts and talents to be shared despite their lack of energy and strength.

- Invite them to read to a child or help with simple homework assignments.
- Invite them to be the “audience” for practice time before a recital or a talk.
- Invite them to help with projects or tasks at their pace.
- Invite them to go with you to activities or bring activities to them as they are able.
- Ask for their opinion about important questions in your life.
- Include them in preparations you are making for your church calling.
- Make them part of a team for teaching, projects, & assignments, etc.
- Have them make birthday phone calls or visiting teaching phone calls.
- Call, Skype, or FaceTime when you are out of town.

**Be aware that the things you say can have positive and/or negative effects.**

Sometimes the things we say seem to indicate that we don’t believe the illness is legitimate, that the illness would be resolved by taking a better approach, or that the real problem is a lack of faith to be healed.

*Most chronically ill people have spent years seeking renewed health and vitality. They have probably tried every suggestion you have, and dozens of things that you haven’t even considered.*

*Many health problems are exacerbated by stress, but not caused by it.*

**Be willing to change your attitudes toward the chronically ill.**

Spoken or unspoken, our attitudes cause hurt to those we could be helping. If your “service” takes away feelings of self-worth, dignity, privacy, motivations to live and do, or independence unnecessarily, then your “service” becomes a “disservice”

*Build them up with words of encouragement.*

*Keep inviting the chronically ill. Don’t give up on extending invitations because they haven’t been able to make it before.*

*Give them jobs that won’t overwhelm them. Give them flexible jobs, so that they can work when they feel well.*

*Listen. You don’t have to solve their problems.*

*Be open-minded and realize that the chronically ill often don’t have the energy to accomplish as much as someone who is well.*
REFRAME your thoughts and actions to preserve self-worth, privacy, dignity, independence; and to give service that gives purpose to the chronically ill.

### Examples of Reframing

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of Saying/Doing</th>
<th>Saying/Doing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You just lay down and let me do the dishes.”</td>
<td>“If you feel up to it, I’d love to help you with the dishes and we can visit while we work.”</td>
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<td>“You’re just going to have to give up making candy for Christmas.”</td>
<td>“If you want to make candy for Christmas, but you’re worried it will be too much for you, let me come and help you. I’ve always wanted to learn to make homemade candy.”</td>
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<td>“You don’t look sick.”</td>
<td>“It’s good to see you.”</td>
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<td>Fixing a full-course, elaborate meal.</td>
<td>Fix something simple, buy something yummy, &amp; spend extra time visiting.</td>
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<td>Giving one-sided service.</td>
<td>Let them help you reciprocate in service when they desire. e.g. They can provide the gas and you’ll mow the lawns. They can match your socks.</td>
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### Most Importantly, think of what would make you most comfortable in these situations.

Connecting what we each have to give.

We all have challenges and burdens to carry in this life. Our challenges are not the same, but we can help lift each other’s burdens. The chronically ill may need your help, but you may need their help, too. Christ fed the 5,000 physically with what was available, a basket with loaves and fish, but more importantly, he fed them spiritually. We can each give what we have to give, what we have in our own “baskets” at the time.

Our service doesn’t need to be an elaborate production or project...love is really the medicine needed most.

“We can do no great things, only small things with great love.”
--Mother Theresa
To the chronically ill from the chronically ill.

Remember that those serving us are serving out of love. They are doing their best and may say or do something that could be taken as offensive. This is not their intent. Take service as it is meant—with love. We need to be slow to take offense and quick to forgive. We need to let others know what we need. Yes, sometimes we want to be left alone and sometimes we want to be independent, but there are times that we need to learn to lean on others.

In John 14:18, it states, “I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.” Oftentimes, it is through others that Christ will come to us and not leave us comfortless. These are the times that we need to lean on others.

Additionally, we need to strive to find ways to serve others. We can give the most precious gift we have, that of love and kindness, wherever we go. We often get caught up in our illness and what we can’t do. We need to focus on what we can do, how we can lift someone else’s burdens. There are ways that we can help. Sometimes we just need to be creative.

And remember to show gratitude and let people know that we appreciate their help!

“I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

--Stephen Grellet

“And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple...Thou shalt bear their infirmities.”

--D&C 52:40 & 42:52
In the Picture....Together
Make part of your service to the chronically ill be...to help them serve in their own unique way. Some “make and do” type projects are listed below. However, there are many types of service.

SERVICES THAT COULD BE PERFORMED
by the Chronically Ill...with a little help from a friend!

- Loomed knit hats for the homeless or cancer patients
- Head bands for cancer patients
- Waiting room kits with snacks and things to do while families or individuals wait for medical appointments and during treatments
- Courage capes for children who have to be hospitalized
- “Pocket hearts” for children or adults who are struggling with health issues or sadness.
- Fleece blankets for children or adults being hospitalized or going to shelters
- Hygiene kits for disaster areas
- Greeting cards or make your own card kits
- Walker or wheelchair bags to help hold helpful items
- Rice bags for easing pain and giving warmth to those at hospitals, nursing homes, etc.
- C-pillows, neck pillows
- Beanie buddies to cheer displaced or ill children, or siblings of those who are ill
- Fairy Wands
- The chronically ill could make these items themselves, or assemble kits that others could assemble at assisted living centers, veterans centers, detention centers, etc.
- Others could assemble these kits for the chronically ill to make and do or make and do them to give the finished products to the chronically ill.
- More ideas, as well as instructions and patterns for many of these projects can be found at: http://ce.byu.edu/cw/womensconference/service_project.php
  Look under “project tutorials” for more details

Service with the use of electronics - internet, phone, computer:

- Through the church website at: vineyard.lds.org.
  Add image search words; Translate documents; Index Historical Records; English Conversation Practice; Research family history
- Skype/FaceTime, telephone, e-mail, etc.
  --Check with the local schools to see if it is a possibility to tutor students with needs in your area via the internet.
  --Check with local rehabilitation and assisted and nursing facilities, veterans hospitals, etc, to see if there are residents with internet access that would like visits over the internet, or by telephone.
  --Read books over the internet to grandchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbor children, residents at nursing homes, veteran’s hospitals etc.
- Assemble and type newsletters or histories for: family, ward, organizations, individuals in nursing homes, veteran’s hospitals, homebound, etc.
Sources and Links:

1) “Helping Those with Chronic Illness,” by Sherrie Johnson, Ensign July 1994  

2) “Thou Shalt Bear Their Infirmities”: Meeting the Challenges of the Chronically Ill, by 
   William and Bonnie Dyer, Ensign January 1975  

3) “But You Don’t LOOK Sick...”, Susan Williams, October 2006, PublicHealthAlert.org,  
   www.anapsid.org/cnd/files/looksick.pdf

4) Short video on Empathy vs. Sympathy narrated by Brené Brown :  
   http://brenebrown.com/2013/12/10/rsabear/

5) “What Those with Chronic Pain or Illness DON’T Want to Hear”, by Toni Bernhard J.D. on June 27, 2012, Turning Straw Into Gold, 
   https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/turning-straw-gold/201206/what-those-chronic-pain-or-illness-

6) “What Those with Chronic Illness DO want to Hear”, by Toni Berhnard J.D.  
   https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/turning-straw-gold/201207/what-those-chronic-pain-or-illness-do-want-hear

7) http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/overview/index.htm

8) http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/aging.htm

9) http://ce.byu.edu/home