

Long Distance Caregiving

By Peggy Slade-Sowders, Director, Living Well Senior Solutions

Long distance caregiving can be very challenging, but the benefit to those you support is great no matter how far the distance. Often, when spouses care for each other, it is only when a crisis occurs for one, that the deficits of the other become apparent. As signs of a parent's frailty or decline in health start to become evident, it is time to begin planning for their care before an emergency occurs. Planning in advance of a crisis should include emergency information, options for care and available resources.

As all situations are different, it is important to have honest and open communication with your parents or loved ones as well as other family members. Family dynamics, financial resources and ability of parents to provide guidance for their own care should all be considered. Determining if the family can work as a team and agreeing in advance how their skills can complement each other will assist in spreading out the stress and additional workload.

There are two key functions of a local or long distance caregiver: One is to gather information and the other is to coordinate appropriate services. Gathering information includes legal and financial documents such as a Will, Power of Attorney, Living Will, and location of bank accounts or other financial assets. Knowing where important papers are kept and who the key professionals are, such as physicians, attorney, financial planner, etc. are critical to ensure effective care. Knowledge of current medical conditions and medications are beneficial for accurate communication with medical professionals.

When coordinating services, consider automating what you can for bill paying, grocery delivery and prescription refills for example. These require that the caregiver is named on the bank account and identified on the HIPAA release for medical information. Seek out help from people in your parent's community, such as neighbors, friends, church family and physicians. Spend time researching local senior resources and services available through the local Area on Aging and Senior Centers.

Consider using an ***Aging Life Care™ Professional*** to help find appropriate services, oversee medical issues and provide spot checks and management of the care team. It can be extremely helpful to have a professional providing objective feedback and guidance. For more information about how to access this service, contact Peggy at pslade-sowders@erslife.org.

Planning visits to obtain necessary information and to allow time to focus on fun and relaxing activities as a family is important. The realization of your role as a caregiver can be stressful and it is important that you set up a support network for yourself as well as your parents.

Helpful Resources:

Family Caregiver Alliance - www.caregiver.org

AARP - www.aarp.org

National Institute on Aging - www.nia.nih.gov

Apps for computers, iphone/ipad and Android devices: Caring Bridge, Lotsa Helping Hands, Caring Village, Elder411, Care Zone