



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Caregiving from a Distance

Caring for someone from a distance can be just as stressful as or even more stressful than being there. Long-distance caregivers may not be on-site providing direct care, but they could be busy in their role as care managers-locating and coordinating services, negotiating with the care receiver, health care providers and family members, delegating tasks, monitoring the situation and making decisions.

Long distance caregivers also use much of their vacation time from work to travel back and forth. There are a number of ways for a long-distance caregiver to become involved in caregiving. The following are some suggestions that others have tried.

- Contact your loved one frequently; establish routines for calls; send brief newsy letters; provided preaddressed envelopes with return address labels; send clippings, photos, home videos, books, record and send cassettes tapes back and forth.
- Learn all you can about your family member's disease or disability. There may be a specialized agency close by (for example and Alzheimer's Society of MS Society) that has relevant information. You can always call the Family Caregivers' Network Society in Victoria for information on resources or to find out if there is a similar organization close to where you live. Alternatively, the Internet is a great source of information, but it can be difficult to tell how valid the information is.
- Make yourself available to your family member, and if you are not the primary caregiver, make yourself available to the family member who is. The purpose of a visit, no matter where it occurs, is to renew and reshape your relationship as well as to provide the more involved caregiver with some much-needed time off.
- Obtain a copy of the local phone directory where your family member lives if you want to reach people, services or programs. Keep a record of the "who, what, when, were and why" of the calls, as well as follow-up notes.
- With approval from your loved one, arrange for programs/services such as Meals on Wheels, telephone reassurance, a friendly visitor, and Adult Day Support programs.
- Contact local offices that provide information, referral and services to seniors and caregivers.
- Offer help with financial matters.
- Keep the following information about our family member on hand:
 - Date of birth
 - Sin number
 - Health Care number
 - Health Insurance information
 - Up-to-date list of medications being taken
 - Names, addresses and telephone numbers of doctors, hospitals and clinics involved in their medical care
 - Copy of the advance directive
 - Power of attorney

An example of how one long-distance caregiver juggled her responsibilities:

One daughter of an aging and frail father found the following ways of providing emotional and practical support from a distance.

1. **Visit as often as you can.** “I juggled work projects so I could go back every two months for a week or long weekend during the critical period of my father’s hospitalization and rehabilitation”.
2. **Lobby to make the care receiver distinctly a person, not just a patient.** “I told each nurse or therapist I encountered stories about my father, and the sort of person he is.”
3. **Make sure the care receiver is credited for progress on his medical chart.** This can count in evaluating his future.
4. **Call the caregiving parent/siblings and other nearby siblings regularly.** “I kept track of important dates, such as family conference days, to check on his progress”.
5. **Offer perspective.** “I reminded my mother and sister how far my father had come since the first week, the sixth week, despite ups and downs”.
6. **Talk to the care receiver by phone.** “I called the nurse’s station and asked the nurse to transfer the call to his room and help him hold the phone”.
7. **Get to know the medical and nursing personnel by phone.** “I made numerous long-distance calls. During one crisis I spent an entire day on the phone. I was eager to help and I was not afraid to be the “bad guy” if it seemed something was going wrong”.
8. **Send reminders of home and family.** Cards and snapshots, videotapes and recordings of family voices, are comforting. Include useful information from books, magazines and library journals for the caregivers.

If you are the primary, long-distance caregiver, there are services in many localities you can purchase to do the running around/investigating/arranging for you. In Victoria, there are at least four such services. They are listed in the 2013-2014 Seniors Serving Seniors Directory under Care Planning Management, which is available online at: www.seniorsservingseniors.bc.ca or from the Seniors Serving Seniors office (250) 382-4331. Check to see if similar services for Care Management Planning are available where your care receiver is located.

Adapted from: Resource Guide for Family Caregivers, published by the Family Caregivers’ Network Society, Victoria, BC, 2003.