



## Family Caregivers of British Columbia

### Tips for Long Distance Caregivers

- First of all remember, you may not be able to do everything, but you will be able to do enough. Know that even the best caregivers feel a sense of guilt, believing that they “failed to do enough”.
- Start a dialogue with your parent to discuss what his or her care choices might be further down the road. Explore services, resources and other avenues for care available in his or her community so you will know where to turn should their needs change.
- Your aging parent may not always be forthright with the truth about their needs or declining health. If you have a support network in place with key contact people identified, you should be able to get a clearer picture of the real situation. Key contact people might include a family member, a close friend, a nurse, a minister, a doctor or others who regularly visit your parent. They will often be the first to notice a change in their health or ability, so calling them directly can save you time and effort. Ask them to alert you if they notice changes in your parent’s behavior, appearance, attitude, memory, mobility, diet or food habits. Ask them if they have any suggestions to better assist your parents. Keep a list of their phone numbers, addresses and when they should be contacted.
- Ask a member of this informal support system to check in with your parent on a regular basis. When you live at a distance there needs to be some person at the other end whom you feel comfortable phoning or who will agree to call you collect when problems arise. Sometimes you may need to set up a financial arrangement with a neighbour or student who agrees to run errands or perform various chores to help the care receiver to manage his or her life.
- If that is not adequate, you may need to hire someone to help your family member with meals and personal care. Discuss with your parent what services they may need. Be sensitive to their views on the situation. They may be concerned about having strangers in their home or may have trouble facing change. If you agree on at least one service, begin with that one. It is important that they feel in control and able to make decisions.
- Call the local seniors center for information. Gather information on housing, transportation and home care agencies.
- Telephone assurance programs, usually staffed by volunteers, place calls to frail and disabled persons living alone. If the person who is called does not answer at the designated check-in time, the volunteer then places a call to an emergency number

provided by the family. Many organizations also participate in friendly visitor programs that provide regular visits to elders who aren't able to get out much.

- Pick up a copy of the local telephone directory and take it home with you.
- Schedule regular visits. Plan in advance what you need to accomplish during this visit in addition to visiting with your relative. Be observant while you visiting. Do you notice anything unusual? Are they eating regularly? Are the bills getting paid? Make appointments with your relative's physician, case manager, lawyer and accountant ahead of time so you can meet each of these people in person.
- Arrange in advance for an emergency contact near your care receiver – a neighbour or a relative – and know how to reach that person. Make sure the person is willing to check on your care receiver in a possible emergency, regardless of the time and on short notice. Keep the name of the contact person with you at all times and ensure that they have your telephone number.
- In a non-emergency situation, try to step back and evaluate whether or not you really need to go or if you can send someone else in your place. Can someone take care of it locally? Can you rely on your informal network to take care of the situation? This will free you up to use your time off from work and travel money for emergency situations or times when it is essential for you to be there.
- Prepare a list of contact numbers to take with you so that when you arrive at your care receiver's home, you will have the names and phone numbers of key people, such as her physician and other healthcare team members, her home support aide, pharmacist and a neighbour. This will save you the time and stress of gathering this information when under duress.
- Once you arrive, assess the situation, attend to your care receiver's needs as an "on-site" caregiver might and make arrangements that will allow you to stay on top of the situation once you return home.
- If more than one family member is involved, decide who will contact the healthcare providers or facility for updates and how that information will be shared. Find out what the best time to call each person (healthcare provider and family member). This will minimize doctors and nurses from having to constantly repeat the information.
- Make sure legal and financial affairs are in place and up-to-date. Ensure that you know who your relative's lawyer and accountant are, where their bank is located and also where they keep their important documents.
- Plan ahead to have family leave or personal days available in case you need to make an unexpected visit to your relative. Put aside money or a credit card to pay for the trip.