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Long Distance Caregiving for a Loved One is Particularly Difficult

By Linda LaPointe

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The phone rang at 5 a.m. John was sure it couldn't be good news at that hour. He was right. Mom's neighbors were calling him from 850 miles away in Texas to say that she was out watering her roses an hour ago on a cold, early spring morning. John knew that she had been failing. She wasn't the same Mom he could always count to stand by him. Now he needed to stand by her. But how?

Families are now living further apart from each other. This is difficult because your elders require ever-increasing assistance, yet the distance between you makes it difficult to perform the tasks of a primary caregiver. But most elders are reluctant to leave their home of many years to move to the town in which their adult children live. This reluctance can become a stressful point of contention between adult children and their parent(s).

Often, it is a financial issue. In-home care and assisted living can be much more expensive in New York or California than in the center of the country. Resources simply may not stretch as far to allow one to live as one chooses. Regardless of the reasons, many adult children find themselves far away and concerned that parents are not doing as well as they may insist in those telephone visits. There are some ways to help manage long distance caregiving. +Try to visit as soon as possible to assess the situation. Take notes of possible problem areas and gather information about senior resources in their area. +Make sure legal and financial affairs are in place. Keep copies of important papers and telephone numbers of contacts. +Plan ahead to have back up providers to care for your own family in case you need to make an unexpected visit to your relative. It is also a good idea to bank some vacation or sick days from work for these visits as well. +Seek the assistance of a Professional Care Manager specializing in assessing and monitoring the needs of the elderly. +Consider all the options

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before moving your relative, but begin talking with them about this possibility. You could be surprised to learn they are willing to move closer to you, but they never mentioned this for fear of burdening you with their problems. +Retain a copy of the Yellow Pages that serves your parent's community. The next time your parent calls and you need to locate resources, you won't need to search out numbers or call information long-distance.

When you live hundreds of miles away from an aging loved one, there is a constant level of anxiety over his or her welfare. Every family must make their own decisions about how to handle the situation. Dr. Mary Pipher, in her book *Another Country, Navigating the Emotional Terrain of our Elders* makes a convincing argument for having the aging parent(s) move near the adult child who will, or currently handles their financial or care decisions. It is an option that should be given much consideration. Be sure to have a contact person who lives close to the parent periodically checking on their health and cognitive status. Better yet, also have someone who can act upon your and her or his behalf until you can.

Linda LaPointe, MRA, has helped hundreds of families as an ElderLife Matters consultant and national educator. Find free informational articles, exercises, links, audio interviews and products to help families experiencing elder issues at her website

Do You Know What To Do If Someone You Loved One Is In the Hospital?

By Tammy Gonzales

If someone you know and love is in the hospital there are a few things you need to know especially if you are the Health Care Agent or the surrogate that will be acting and making decisions for the patient.

Keep a notebook and a pen available with you at all times. You will have many things going through your mind that you may need to keep track of and the notebook will be helpful. Much of this information will be exchanged in the days to come with physicians, other family members and friends, and the discharge planner. Family or friends may be asking you questions and offering to do things for you. You do not have to do all of the writing, assign whoever is with you to do some of the writing for you.

Be sure to use the opportunities that family and friends will be offering you now. Select someone you trust who is supportive to be your helper. Let that individual know what it is that you need for them to do. Several others will be offering to help as well, but for the next few days you need a support person. There will be those that offer to do specific things for you, allow them to do those things as long as you trust them. Then, there will be other individuals that will ask if there is anything that they can do for you that is non-specific, if know what these individuals can do for you, go ahead and ask them to do it. Make the most out of this opportunity to allow others to give to you when they offer. (They may not later).

Find out who the discharge planner is and schedule a meeting as soon as possible. Discharge planning is a process and it begins at admission. The discharge planner will help you arrange the care

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needed for your loved one or friend when it is time for them to go home. They must notify you of their plans before the discharge occurs. The discharge planner can also be your liaison to get needed information from physician and the different specialists who are following your loved one or friend.

Ask the nurse when the physician will be doing his rounds. Most physicians do daily rounds or have rounds assigned. Be there during rounds. Make the most of these daily opportunities. This will be the time that you can ask the physician questions and set up a meeting to talk about your loved ones condition, progress, diagnostics, treatments, medication and what may happen in the future.

Contact your insurance company to find out what is covered or not covered in your policy. Get the name of a contact person and their assistant's name for future questions that you will have for them about rehabilitation, home care, nursing home care, etc. If, you have Medicare, the discharge planner or admissions office will be able to help with Medicare coverage while your patient is in the hospital.

You are the advocate now. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Every question you ask and receive answers to will help you make better decisions about the care your loved one will need. No matter what it is that you do not know or understand about the care that your loved one is receiving, ask. Some professionals forget to break down their knowledge in to terms that are easy to understand. Ask them to simplify or use layman's terms.

Take care of yourself. Make sure that you are drinking adequate fluids including water. Be sure to have your regular meals and don't rely on snacks to keep you going. You need rest. Try to take small naps when your loved one is napping even if it is at bedside. Use a Do Not Disturb sign if you need to. Remind others when you need privacy. You may require emotional support. The hospital has a Chaplin and social workers available that can offer you support and counseling.

Take some time to think about how you may or may not be able to care for your loved one. Think about the treatments your loved one is receiving and if the treatment is one that you can learn to do. How will you help your loved one with tasks of activities of daily living? Will you be able to help them walk, transfer, toilet, dress, bath, and eat if that is the help they need? You may not be able to some of these tasks, you may require help, training or maybe a caregiver. You may have to work. Your loved one may require more treatment or rehabilitation to be able to come home. In any case, you should carefully evaluate your circumstances and meet with the discharge planner and let him/her know what help you may need and find out what alternatives are available.

Following are resources links to additional information:

Your Medicare Coverage

National Alliance for Caregiving

RevitaLife Coaching & Consulting provides coaching, consulting, message board, free assessments and free sessions to get you on your way. For additional information please visit RevitaLife on the web at:

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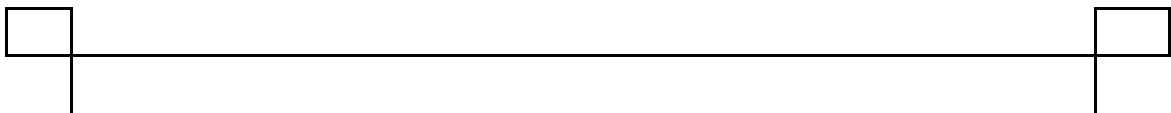
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