

## Long-Distance Caregivers

If you have found yourself in the the position of being a long distance caregiver for someone in your family, don't feel alone. Many people in our community have found themselves in the same situation. The following are some ideas from the Handbook for Long-Distance Caregivers by Bob Rosenblatt. and Carol Van Steenberg.

The Journey begins.....It is the long-dreaded phone call. Your mother lives 1,000 miles away, and some problems have developed. You say, "I'll be there as soon as I can book a flight." Suddenly, you're playing a new role. You're now what the professionals in the aging field call a "long-distance caregiver."

When you first enter the unfamiliar world of long-distance caregiving, you may not see the personal rewards ahead. But they're there, along with very real challenges. You may be the main person who oversees your loved one's care, or you may be a mainstay for someone else, perhaps a sibling. Either way, you'll play a key role on a caregiving team that supports your loved one in being as independent as possible.

You can expect your caregiving role in include two key functions: Information Gatherer (using websides and other resources) and Coordinator of Services. Community agencies may exist to help you and your family handle the challenges. Your job is to find out about these resources and put the pieces together in a way that's most effective for your family.

There's no one right way to be a caregiver; there are many possibilities. Think of it as a journey. Take it step by step. Spend time at the beginning to understand your situation and your options will serve you better than rushing into action without a plan. A team approach is key to success. Conditions change along the way and your strategies will have to shift accordingly. Be sure to get the support you need and take care of yourself along the way.

It will help you immeasurably if, before there is a crisis, your parent provides you with information to locate his or her records, important telephone contacts and other essential items.

Legal documents, such as Durable Powers of Attorney and Advance Directives, can and should be prepared before a medical condition makes it impossible to do so. To get help you can go one the Internet and type in "long-distance caregiving" and you will get quite a list.

First and foremost, get a complete medical diagnosis for physical or cognitive problems. You will want to find out what your relative can do independently- what can e done with a little help and what your loved one cannot do at all right now. Make a checklist of all that will need to be done. Be sure to introduce yourself to your family member's doctor and any others engaged in providing care.

For more ideas around this issue, look to next weeks article. If you would like to talk to someone, please call Hospice at 923-7276 and Nancy Jean Keeler will be happy to set up a time to help you with these issues.