

# Long Distance Care Giving: Additional challenges arise when caregivers are not nearby

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Although most family caregivers live close enough to those they care for to provide day-to-day help, some do not. Long distance caregiving has become a reality for many adult children with that care sometimes called “suitcase care.” Family that are ready to fly at a moment’s notice...keeping a packed suitcase at the door in order to be able to catch the first flight when the call comes: “Mom fell. She is on her way to the hospital.”

As generations become increasingly independent and large numbers of young adults are moving away from home, a new concern comes to the surface: how will we care for our parents as they get older? This question seems to be more common as baby boomers age and adult children are realizing that their parents will need help and, in most cases, will wish to stay at home as long as possible. This childhood

home may be many miles away from where their families are now located. The following are a few tips for those caregiving from a distance that may help coordinate the care of loved ones:

Start a notebook to organize information such as medical diagnosis, prescription information, and important contacts (physicians, attorneys, friends, neighbors, financial counselors, etc.).

Locate your loved ones’ legal and financial documents.

Establish pattern for routine contact, in order to understand and be able to determine changes in function or needs.

Watch for warning signs of declining faculties such as changes in grooming, eating, and social activities, the way he/she manages money, cleans, shops, and gets around. If you notice a decline, initiate contact with your family member’s physician.

Determine what can realistically be done from afar and figure out who will fill in the gaps of care.

Check the local phone book and area office on aging for a list of community resources.

Establish a network of support (neighbors, friends, geriatric care managers) and keep in touch.

Hire help. Geriatric care managers can help evaluate your loved ones’ needs, coordinate the care you wish for your loved one to receive, and communicate with you on a routine basis about his/her mental, physical, and emotional status.

Keep in touch with your loved one by phone, letters, and e-mail. Record any changes you sense in his/her personality or ability to function day by day. Also keep in contact with the care recipient’s health care providers, home attendants, and other professionals.

Communicating with providers and helpers as well as coordinating services are essential for long-distance caregivers. Care managers can partner with you to provide the best possible care for your loved one while giving you the assurance that their needs are met.