

LONG DISTANCE CAREGIVING

Michael Faber, MA, RSW - Director, GRCC Older Learner Center

Nearly 1-in-4 households in America, and 1-in-3 households in Kent County provide some form of care to an aging loved one. These 7 million Americans provide 80% of the care to ailing or vulnerable family members. Approximately 3.3 million caregivers provide long distance caregiving for an older loved one. These caregivers live an average of 480 miles from the people for which they care, and spend an average of 4 hours traveling to that person. Long distance caregivers have an average age of 46 years old; spend an average of 35 hours providing care each month, and miss 15 million days of work each year due to providing care to a care recipient with an average age of 78 years old.

The needs and issues of long distance caregivers are especially important, since the number of long distance caregivers is expected to double over the next 15 years. In an effort to recognize and address the needs of long distance caregivers the following tips were developed by the Caregiver Resource Network:

1. Make sure what you hear long distance from your loved one and about your loved one matches the reality of the situation.
2. Visit your relative, become a master observer. Look for subtle signs that indicate problem areas. Remember that everyone has different perceptions about how one should live and when one's safety is at risk. For example, a dirty or cluttered house may not mean a parent can no longer live by him/herself, only that he/she needs help in caring for his/her home. It may also mean that he/she is willing to live with lower standards in order to remain at home.
3. Consider a professional assessment of your loved one's condition. If you are uncertain about the situation and potential risks, consider an assessment by an outside professional who can offer a more objective evaluation.
4. Make use of local support persons. Talk with your relative and create a list of persons who have been or may be helpful to them. Keep a running list of these individuals' phone numbers and addresses. This list might be useful to you in trying to provide long distance care for your loved one.
5. Keep all information about the care of your relative in the same place. Use a three-ring binder and section dividers to help you organize your information. This will help save time and hassles.
6. Maximize the independence of your older loved one: As a caregiver, you must walk a fine line, providing help where it is needed, but not undermining your loved one's remaining capabilities.
7. Allow your loved one to retain as much decision-making ability as possible. Remember that your primary objective is to help your loved one to fulfill his/her needs, not to take over your relative's life. In some situations, when your loved one is unable to make decisions, you may need to do so on his/her behalf. But if

at all possible, allow your loved one to control his/her own destiny.

8. Work with your loved one to try to collect key medical, financial, and legal information and documents before a crisis occurs.
9. If possible, arrange a family meeting to discuss your loved one's condition with the goal of providing the assistance and support that is needed to allow your family member to continue to live as independently as possible. Suspend all judgment and blame; allow everyone to voice their opinions and have the opportunity to contribute to the care plan; and if at all possible involve the loved one needing care in the planning and decision making process.
10. Seek information on resources available to help support your loved one within their own community. For information on the programs and services available nationwide to help support your loved one, call toll-free the **ELDERCARE LOCATOR** at **1-800-677-1116**.

This fact sheet is provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network. The **Caregiver Resource Network** is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds.

For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.

Sources: Long Distance Caregiver Project – Alzheimer's Association LA & Riverside, Los Angeles, CA (May 15, 2002, National Web Seminar by Judith Delaney, MFT, Clinical Coordinator). Also adapted from "Long Distance Caregiving" a curriculum packet developed by the Caregiver Resource Network for use in caregiving education. The full program curriculum is available as a free download on the Caregiver Resource Network website at www.CaregiverResource.net.