



## UNDERSTANDING HOW CARING FOR A LOVED ONE AFFECTS YOU

# Long-Distance Caregiving

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A long-distance caregiver lives far away from the stroke survivor. This person may or may not be the primary caregiver.

### What Are the Special Challenges for the Long-Distance Caregiver?

Living far away presents extra challenges in caregiving. Traveling to your loved one can be costly. It may be hard to take time off of work.

If you are not the primary caregiver, you face other challenges. Working with another caregiver involves good communication and understanding. You may not always see eye-to-eye. Remember that you both are trying to provide the best care. Listen to each other and be supportive.

### What Are the First Things You Should Do as a Long Distance Caregiver?

- Plan a visit to your loved one to assess the situation.
- Talk to your loved one about what he or she needs.
- Work closely with the local caregiver, if there is one. The local caregiver is the best judge of what is needed.

### What Questions Should You Ask to Plan Your Loved One's Care?

- What can my loved one (and the local caregiver) do without help from others?
- What specific help does my loved one need and want?
- How will services be paid for?
- How can I help?

### How Can You Find Services in the Local Area?

**Use the telephone and Internet to find local services** – It can be difficult to find services when you are not familiar with the local area.

**Contact the social worker at the local VA medical center** – The VA provides short and long-term home care services. The VA may pay for some services.

**Contact the local Area Agency on Aging** – They can assess your loved one’s needs and eligibility for services. They can help you find local services. These include housekeeping, personal care and other services.

**Use a phone book from your loved one’s area** – You can find one on-line. The Blue Pages list state and local services. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has contact information for The Blue Pages.

**Find help in your community** – Check with the local church, Veterans’ association or community groups for support.

**Talk to a geriatric care manager or care coordinator** – This is a specialist in planning care for older people. The local Area Agency on Aging can help you find one. The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers can also help. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has contact information for finding your local Area Agency on Aging. It also has information for the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers.

## **What Can You Do Living Far Away?**

You can’t provide daily care. But, you can help in other ways.

- Arrange services and hire healthcare workers.
- Help with finances; you can pay bills on-line or through direct deposits or the mail service.
- Obtain information about insurance benefits.
- Learn all you can about your loved one’s medical problems and treatments.
- Show your love by telephoning and sending gifts and letters.

## **Why Is It Important to Talk with Your Loved One and Local Caregiver Often?**

Your loved one’s needs will change over time. Plan conference calls with your family, professionals and other workers. A geriatric care manager can also keep tabs on how things are going.

## **What Is the Family and Medical Leave Act?**

You can take leave for some family reasons. Check with your employer. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires some employers to allow up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Some states have laws that expand leave. The “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet has more information on the FMLA.

## Helpful Tips

- **It is normal to feel guilty that you are not doing enough** – Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can.
- **Coordinate care from a distance** – Keep a list of friends, local people and agencies that can help.

## Remember

- Work as a team with your loved one and local caregiver to plan care.
- You can do many things as a long-distance caregiver. You can pay bills, find information and offer support.
- Contact a VA social worker, a geriatric care manager or look on-line to find help.

## More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

**Link Disclaimer:** Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

### Blue Pages

Web: <http://www.officialusa.com/state/state.information/bluepages>

The Blue Pages has a directory of various state and local services, including links to local hospitals and medical facilities.

### Eldercare Locator, Area Agency on Aging

Web: <http://www.eldercare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-677-1116

Eldercare locator can help you find community-based services like transportation, meals and caregiver support services. These resources are found through your local Area Agency on Aging.

### **Family Caregiver Alliance**

Web: <http://caregiver.org>

Phone: 1-800-445-8106

The Family Caregiver Alliance provides information, education and services for caregivers. Some information is also available in Spanish.

The Family Caregiver Alliance has a “Handbook for Long-Distance Caregivers.” This handbook provides practical tips for assessing needs as well as a list of resources. It can help you set up a local care team.

[http://caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content/pdfs/op\\_2003\\_long\\_distance\\_handbook.pdf](http://caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content/pdfs/op_2003_long_distance_handbook.pdf)

### **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**

Web: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla>

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires some employers to allow up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Some states have laws that expand leave.

### **My HealthVet (MHV)**

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet (MHV) provides trusted information on stroke and other health conditions. It also provides resources for stroke caregivers and tools to track your loved one’s health.

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

### **National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (NAPGCM)**

Web: <http://caremanager.findlocation.com>

Phone: 1-520-881-8008

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers can help you find a certified care manager in your area.

### **National Institute on Aging (NIA)**

Web: <http://www.nia.nih.gov>

Phone: 1-800-222-4225

The National Institute on Aging has a publication for caregivers called “So Far Away: Twenty Questions for Long-Distance Caregivers.” It offers answers to 20 commonly asked questions long-distance caregivers have. Go to this link:

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/healthinformation/publications/longdistancecaregiving>

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

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**References:** National Institute on Aging. (2006). *So Far Away: Twenty Questions for Long-Distance Caregivers*. National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., NIH Publication No. 06-5496. Retrieved August 14, 2008, from: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/>; Nelson-Merrill, Creston (Ed.). (1993). *Florida Caregiver Handbook: An Essential Resource Guide for Caregivers and Their Older Loved Ones*. HealthTrac Books, Tallahassee, FL; Rosenblatt, Bob, and Caron Van Steenberg. (2003). *Handbook for Long-Distance Caregivers: An Essential Guide for Families and Friends Caring for Ill and Elderly Loved Ones*. Retrieved August, 8, 2008, from [http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content/pdfs/op\\_2003\\_long\\_distance\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content/pdfs/op_2003_long_distance_handbook.pdf).

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