Long-Distance Caregiving:
Assessing & Addressing Family Needs Across the Miles
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Coordinator of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.’s Dementia Helpline
Long-Distance Caregiving

- Levels of involvement
- Practical & emotional challenges
- Assessing needs
- Identifying resources
- Making the most of your visits
- Sharing responsibilities
- Staying in touch
- Moving
Levels of Involvement

sole person responsible

supporting on-site caregiver(s)
Practical Challenges

- distance
- cost
  - of travel
  - of providing alternate care
- time
- other family responsibilities
- work
Emotional Challenges

- dealing with grief
- feeling powerless
- being frustrated with …
- feeling guilty
Assessing the Needs
Assessing the Needs

- Health
- Eating habits
- Safety
- Mental functioning
- Emotions
- Finances/legal
- Social life
- Daily living
Health

- new health problems
- worsening of prior health problems
- incontinence
- fainting
- declining vision/hearing
- change in sleep habits
Health

- poor hygiene
- unsanitary living conditions
- excessive use of alcohol/medication
- difficulty managing medications
- not keeping medical appointments
Eating Habits

- irregular/forgetting to eat
- unhealthy/unsafe
- difficulty swallowing
- no appetite/weight loss
- rapid weight gain
Safety

- falls/slippery floor surfaces
- unsteady in the bath/shower
- difficulty transferring from toilet/chair
- frequent burns or bruises
- electrical hazards in the house
Safety

- leaves appliances on
- wanders outside the house
- leaves doors unlocked
- locks himself out of the house
- unsafe driving
Mental Functioning

- poor judgement
- mental confusion
- inappropriate behaviour
- hallucinations/paranoia
- disorientation
- increased memory loss
- difficulty finding words
Emotions

- depression/sadness/crying
- frequent anger
- fearfulness
- withdrawal/isolation
Finances/Legal

- unsafe with money/hides money
- mismanages finances
- vulnerable to scams
- Power of Attorney, etc.
Social Life

- isolation
- loss of social skills
- loss of interest in hobbies
Daily Living

- shopping
- accessing transportation
- cooking meals
- hygiene
- cleaning the house/laundry
Identifying Local Resources
## Local Resources

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<th>Service</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Phone/email</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>MEALS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals on Wheels</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>(250) 000-0000</td>
<td>M-F: 9-6 pm</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.mealsws.com">www.mealsws.com</a></td>
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<td>TRANSPORTATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>HandyDart</td>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>(250) 222-2222</td>
<td>8 – 6 pm</td>
<td>2 days advance</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.handydd.com">www.handydd.com</a></td>
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<td>booking</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Local Resources

- Alzheimer Society
- local community health units
- internet
- local phone book
- “little black book”
Local Resources

- day program
- meal delivery services
- private homemakers
- transportation options
- Letter Carrier’s Alert
Local Resources

- directory of seniors’ services, community services and programs
- libraries
- people living in the community
- possible use of technology
Local Resources

- develop relationships
- express gratitude
- address confidentiality issues
Making the Most of Your Visit
Visiting

- plan your appointments ahead of time
- research local services
- plan with the person with dementia
- reassess the person’s needs
- make a list of
  - medication
  - emergency #s
  - contact #s
Sharing Responsibilities
Sharing Responsibilities

- family members
- friends and neighbours in the community
- service agencies, contractors
- non-profit agencies, social clubs, religious groups, volunteer organizations
- key people in the person’s care; social workers, doctors
Staying in Touch, by . . .

- meeting contacts face-to-face
- setting up a routine
- appreciating the others in the network
- supporting each other
- respecting everyone’s contribution
- COMMUNICATING!

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Staying in Touch with the Person with Dementia

- telephone
- letters and postcards
- tapes of messages and songs
- email
- Skype
- and???
Moving
Moving the Person

- to your home
- to your area, but his/her own place
- to some kind of facility
Moving the Person

Pros:
- being there
- better support
- safety
- save money
- peace of mind
Moving the Person

Cons:

- leaving familiar place
- stress
- hands-on caregiving
- effect on your family
- qualifying time for service
- availability of care
Should YOU Move?

- practical considerations
- resentment?
- effect on current caregivers
- relief of guilt
- short term vs. long term
REMEMBER!

- Plan early
- Assess the needs of the person
- Involve the person with dementia as much as possible
- Identify local resources
- Collaborate, develop relationships
REMEMBER!

- Make the most of your visits
- Be flexible, compromise
- Share responsibility
- Be realistic
- Maintain a support system
- Go easy on yourself!

Alzheimer Society
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Helpful Websites

- www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/LongDistanceCaregiving
- www.howtocare.com/caregiving.htm
- www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content/pdfs/op_2003_long_distance_handbook.pdf