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*Listening, learning,
and living together:
it's the science of life.*

Long-Distance Caregiving¹

Patricia Bartlett & Suzanna Smith²

Do you take care of an older family member at a distance? Long-distance caregivers are those who help older family members who live at least an hour away. Whether you care for a loved one who lives in another state or just an hour's drive away, you probably spend quite a bit of time in caregiving. Like other caregivers, you may find yourself thinking about the services the older person needs, making arrangements for their care or checking on the care they receive, or you may be planning for what you need to do when you see the family member next.

A recent survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving found that despite the distance, three-fourths of caregivers help with activities like transportation, shopping, managing finances or cooking. They spend, on the average, 22 hours a month on this. Most caregivers are able to visit their loved one at least once a month, although budgeting for these trips may become difficult (National Alliance for Caregiving and Zogby International, 2004).

Long-distance caregiving can be complicated and demanding. Almost a quarter of the long-distance caregivers are the primary or only caregiver. Eighty percent of distance caregivers work full- or part-time (National Alliance for Caregiving and Zogby International, 2004).

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2. Patricia Bartlett, staff writer, and Suzanna Smith, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, and Executive Producer, Family Album Radio, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

This kind of workload affects both home and work life. A third of caregivers missed days of work to take care of these duties. About 44% changed their work schedules and 25% came in late or left early. Both men and women caregivers were likely to re-arrange their work schedules, take an unpaid leave, or consider changing employers, although women are more likely to miss work or go from full time to part time work (National Alliance for Caregiving and Zogby International, 2004).

How do long-distance caregivers manage? Usually with support from others, particularly a spouse, as well as other family members, friends, and neighbors. Support from employers is also very helpful. Not surprisingly, about half of long-distance caregivers are helping another family member who is providing daily care (National Alliance for Caregiving and Zogby International, 2004).

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/distance.mp3

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/distance.wav

References

National Alliance for Caregiving and Zogby International. (2004). Miles away: The MetLife study of long-distance caregiving. Retrieved May 11, 2007, from <http://www.caregiving.org/data/milesaway.pdf>