Caring From a Distance

The struggles of caring for family members from hundreds to thousands of miles away are growing steadily as the lifespan of adults is extending. According to the National Institute on Aging, about 7 million Americans are considered long-distance caregivers. Due to economic and climate factors and the shifting demographics in the country, Americans are living further away from their hometowns.

The rate of seniors over 65 years of age is expected to increase of the next few decades while the number of caregivers between the ages of 20 and 64 will show little increase. Communication is key when dealing with long-distance caregiving; daily phone calls or video chat can make all the difference. Although these methods can give temporary relief of worries, in case of emergencies such as medical or financial issues, it is tougher to resolve over the phone.

In a report by the National Alliance for Caregiving and Evercare, the average annual expenses for a long distance caregiver are about $8,728, which is far more than from caregivers in close proximity. The challenges facing this issue will only increase as more people reach the age of retirement, however issues of travel and expenses can always be planned and worked out.

Wills and trusts can be used as legal tools to plan for the road ahead. The disposition of properties and of course wishes can be included for a family member to carry out or look after. Wills are important as they allow individuals to have a voice after death. Regardless of how much or how little you own, having a will ready will help allocate possessions and property.

One of the greatest challenges when caring for a loved one from a distance is the knowledge of their medical records. Often times, caregivers are caught off guard during an emergency and will not have the proper information for medical treatment. The difference can vary greatly between diagnoses base on a person’s medical records. Be sure to have the most up-to-date medicine list available for reference. Having a record can tie in with finding the best pharmacy for the patients. Some pharmacies delay the delivery of medications due to insurances holds. It is important to have a schedule worked out with the insurance company as well as the pharmacy to ensure the best delivery of medication.

In case of emergency, especially for seniors that live alone, always have a plan set out and practiced. Having labels for emergency contacts and exits can help with guiding the patient to the necessary safety zone and reaching the right person for help.