



# **Tools for Long Distance Caregiving**

LifeCare Memos – Messages of Compassion

## **Separation**

Many families live several, if not hundreds or thousands of miles apart. Some families deal with international distances, such as those in military service, on business, or during vacation. So, when an elder family member – mom, dad, uncle, aunt or spouse – enters a hospital or is admitted to long term care, a communication plan is needed. The plan should consider modern communication tools such as a cellphone, fax, laptop or desktop computer, email, or maybe even an I-phone. These tools, which may be taken for granted by the younger generation, are now being adopted by the older generations. As many have discovered, they can become time savers when providing care to those we love.

## **Scriptural Directives**

The apostle Paul gives very specific instruction about the care of the elderly and the role of the church towards widows. Children or grandchildren have a **GOD**-given responsibility to care for their widowed mother or grandmother. The Bible says,

*“Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grand-parents, for this is pleasing to **GOD**. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in **GOD** and continues night and day to pray and to ask **GOD** for help...Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”*

(I Timothy 5:3-5, 7-8).

## ***An Illustration***

My younger sister who lives in Colorado, broke her leg while we were on the road between Minneapolis and Chicago. It was then that we learned how valuable a cellphone can be. When you are not in any one place very long or traveling without access to your usual communication tools, a cellphone comes in handy. What I didn't realize was that this "emergency" type of call would become normal over the next four months. During that time I tried to coordinate between two time zones, two work schedules, meal times, and office hours so I could both receive and send critical information which would play a vital role in the care surrounding my sister's recovery.

Even down to the very last day of my sister's hospital stay I was faxing an official approval form that was critical to her release. It was the second time I had sent the fax because local connections in the same building had been less than the best.

## ***Tools***

The communication tools that have proved most helpful to me in my long distance caregiving, and may prove helpful to you, include:

### **1) Telephone – preferably a cellphone**

A cellphone allows you to be in touch with medical personnel as well as other family or your loved one, from just about any place on the planet. It also simplifies the number of telephone numbers that have to be on file to make that critical contact in the event of an emergency. The telephone is the next best thing to being there when your loved one needs you the most. If you can only have one tool I would suggest the cellphone. There are many plans and price ranges which offer a large variety of calling options.

### **2) Fax**

If possible, it is best to have your own private fax machine or have access to one which is easily available for your personal use. This provides more privacy than going to a public location. Again, there are many plans and types including sharing a telephone line, a dedicated line, or receiving via the internet. A last resort is to be near a service center, such as UPS or Kinko's office stores. There may be some items that require signatures, and the quickest, most effective way to do this long distance is by fax. In my own experience, overnight mail could have worked, but it was expensive and you still may have to make a photocopy of your document. When you are dealing with medical issues you really need the speed and conveniences of fax communication.

### 3) Computer

If you do not have a computer, an e-mail setup, or lack the skills and knowledge to use them, let me suggest that you find a family member or friend who can provide this service for you during this time of need. These tools can shorten the paper process by a considerable amount of time and effort. A computer allows great time flexibility. It can sometimes even bring your loved one's case into a top priority position allowing their needs to be met even more quickly.

Many people are also moving to electronic transfers for bill payment, sometimes accepted as the preferred way to pay the medical community or deal with banks. The transmission of private and critical information is becoming safer everyday. However, you need to be sure that your computer is protected against viruses. Also that any monetary transactions are conducted over a secure network.

### 4) U.S. Mail

As slow and cumbersome as "snail mail" may sometimes be, this form of communication is still very reliable and a good way to get official records and official releases processed. It is especially helpful if you need proof of delivery or a receipt. The additional service of return receipt or certified mail can also be very beneficial.

### Hard copy duplication

Access to a good copy machine may be very helpful if you are dealing with a situation which requires multiple copies and you do not have a set of forms that are in duplicate format. This service is almost always available at your local drug store or copy center.

When long-distance communication is needed, or you become responsible for the care of a loved one who is many miles away, you will be thankful that you live with such wonderful tools to assist in the task of long-distance caregiving and communication.

Ken Gooden, 160907

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## **LifeCare Memos®**

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to **GOD**. He said, *"Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O **LORD**; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living'"* (Psalm 142:4-5).

**LifeCare Memos** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.