

## **PULLING TOGETHER**

### *HELPING AGING PARENTS ASSESS THEIR ABILITY TO BE BEHIND THE WHEEL*

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Historically, family members lived in close proximity to one another but not necessarily anymore. It is more difficult to provide care to aging parents from a distance. Siblings who live far apart from one another, and/or far away from their parents might have trouble managing caregiving tasks.

#### **Kathy's story**

Over the years, my husband, Carls family has spread to Colorado, Maryland, Connecticut, and Florida. As they moved farther apart geographically they grew further apart emotionally, sometimes to the point of not having contact with each other for years. When their mother needed caregiving, however, the siblings worked together to make the best decisions for their mother.

All caregivers and especially those who are caregiving from a distance find it difficult to make decisions about a parents care. Decisions about family care might come down to who lives the closest or who has the necessary skills or time to be an active decision maker in his parents care.

Carls mother and youngest sister (Debi) have lived in Maryland for the last six years. Although Carls mom lives in her own apartment, Debi has been her primary caregiver and support system. Carls mom has been in poor health, which puts a lot of stress on Debi and recently, her job has changed and she now travels out of town quite often.

Through many phone calls and e-mails with a sister in Connecticut, a brother in Florida, and Carl in Colorado, the siblings have made decisions as to who should be Power of Attorney (Carl) and Medical Power of Attorney (Donna in CT). Even though both of them live in other states, Carl works at home and Donna would receive information

from the doctors and the nursing home directly that could then be passed on to the other siblings. Further, they thought that having separate responsibilities for each sibling would keep communications open and flowing between everyone. So far this system has worked without any complications and has in fact brought the brothers and sisters closer together than they have been in the past.

### **Keys to caregiving**

Successful caregiving occurs when the family works together as a system. Each sibling plays a specific role in the caregiving process. Although, distance (both geographically and emotionally) might affect the type and amount of care provided by siblings, as a family system they can work together to find the appropriate caregiving tasks and amount of time, so caregiving does not burden one person. In the long run, siblings feel good about their caregiving experiences and they might develop a closer connection with each other and their parent.

### **Helpful Tips:**

- ◇ Keep in touch with your siblings. Call or e-mail each other and let one another know what is going on with Mom or Dad.
- ◇ Lean on your siblings for additional support.
- ◇ Seek educational books or support groups that will assist you with caregiving from a distance.
- ◇ Search the Internet for helpful caregiving Web sites.
- ◇ Do not be shy about asking for additional explanations from doctors or professional staff members if your questions have not been answered to your satisfaction. Remember to be persistent.

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