

Health Politics with Dr. Mike Magee

Addressing The Challenges Of Long-Distance Caregiving Ⓟ

(NAPSA)—Taking care of an elderly loved one can be fulfilling. It isn't always easy, however. Having to do it from another city or state can make the challenges seem even more complex. Out of the 34 million Americans who provide care to older family members, 15 percent live an hour or more away from their relative. Out of these, nearly 80 percent work full- or part-time. How do they manage? It takes organization, determination and a supportive employer.



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Long-distance caregivers provide a wide array of services at great cost to themselves. According to a survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving, long-distance caregivers spend an average of \$392 per month on travel and out-of-pocket expenses.

The expenditure in time is no less than the expenditure in dollars. Out of the more than 1,100 long-distance caregivers contacted by the National Alliance for Caregiving, half of them said they spend nearly 14 hours a month arranging care services and half said they spend another 16 hours a month checking on their care recipient or monitoring the care being received. Nearly three-quarters of these long-distance caregivers provide help with instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) such as transportation, shopping, cooking, cleaning, managing finances and medications—for an average of 22 hours per month.

Considering that so many long-distance caregivers are employed, they often have to make significant adjustments to their work schedules to allow for their caregiving responsibilities. Twenty-five percent of the surveyed long-distance caregivers had shortened

their workday while they were caregiving and 36 percent reported missing full days of work. Twelve percent had taken a leave of absence.

The forces that have created today's long-distance caregiver realities, including an aging population, families separated by distance, more women entering the workforce, and global competitiveness among companies, are unlikely to reverse themselves in the near future. Rather, the challenges and work-balance issues are likely to accelerate. Clearly, long-distance caregiving already impacts retention and productivity.

What can an employer do? Certainly, sensitizing line managers to the issue is a reasonable starting point. Adjusting policies to allow job sharing and short-time relief, as well as providing information and help in coordinating eldercare, are definitely worthwhile investments, compared to the cost of attrition and lost productivity. And, since long-distance caregivers have financial burdens as well as time conflicts, programs that offer help with these are beneficial. For example, voluntary pooling of frequent flyer miles for employees who need to travel on family emergencies is an idea worth considering.

Tangible expressions of support, such as these, address the issue head-on while reinforcing shared values and joint commitment.

For more information on topics such as long-distance caregiving or to receive a free weekly health report from Dr. Magee, visit the Web site at www.HealthPolitics.com.

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