

# Opinion | Caregivers need your help (from a distance)

*June Mewhort*

We all know by now that our nursing home residents are vulnerable to COVID-19 and we have seen families do what they can to alleviate some of the stress through “window visits” and phone calls.

There is another group that needs our support in a big way: primary caregivers. Primary caregivers are spouses and/or other family members who have chosen to support a loved one through a terminal or life-limiting illness.

Even before COVID-19, caregivers were overworked, overstressed and overtired. They spend all day every day caring for a loved one through doctor and treatment visits, prescription pickup, and in home care. That is all on top of doing everything that used to be shared with the ill loved one. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, dog walking, lawn mowing, paying bills are all done by one person, as well as being the emotional support for their loved one.

Until COVID-19, many caregivers happily used services that their local Community Care provides, such as PSW help and volunteer visitors who relieved the pressure for a couple of hours, every day or every few days.

However, now the volunteers are not able to come and some caregivers are refusing PSW help for fear of the virus. The caregivers are often seniors themselves so they, too, are vulnerable and now afraid for their own health as well as that of their loved one.

## YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN...

So now the community needs to step up while maintaining social distancing. We can give caregivers emotional support through phone calls, online chats and even through old-fashioned cards and letters.

Next, we can offer more practical help. Have the caregiver phone in a grocery order, then you pick it up and leave it on their doorstep. Be sure to let them know when you deliver, so that it doesn't sit outside for any length of time.

Offer to walk the dog, if they have one. Have them tie the dog outside for you to pick up. Let them know when you're arriving.

Cook for them. Make extra soup, casseroles, and desserts and drop them by on the doorstep. Again, be sure to let them know you have delivered it.

Anything you can do while maintaining social distance and practicing proper hand hygiene, will be appreciated and will relieve some of the everyday stresses that primary caregivers go through.

Finally, a note to primary caregivers themselves. During this pandemic, supports for you are still being offered through Community Care Hospice Services but now they are online. Virtual meetings are being arranged for the near future. For information please call 705-879-4123.

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