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In today's society, it is quite common for family members to live in different parts of the state or country. Like myself, my mother Florence Kleinschmidt (a life member of NRA) lives in Minnesota; and I live and work in California. This brings up the long-distance caregiver topic. Frequently, following retirement, older parents move to more comfortable (climate or financial) places to live. Children leave home for out-of-town areas to seek the financial rewards present in the "global" community. This is a challenge when the older person's health deteriorates causing the adult child to give thought to how the older adult is managing everyday activities of living. This person is the one we term the "long-distance caregiver," even when this does not imply that the person is,

The Long-Distance Caregiver

necessarily, directly involved in the actual care activities, but rather is emotionally involved in assuring the older adult's "care."

Long-distance caregivers have many questions and issues. They would like to be more available, but commitments prevent them from "going home" frequently, or, perhaps, regularly. Attempting to arrange for services from a distance can be overwhelming as the availability and the cost of services can vary. These are only some of the challenges which need to be addressed. Gaining the acceptance and cooperation of the older adult is one of the other major challenges, as older adults have difficulty facing the loss, actual or perceived, of their independence and freedom. One of the most difficult aspects is gaining accurate information. Often the older adult does not give an accurate description, and the only response may be, "Everything is fine, dear." Frequently, this simply is not true even though more earnest inquiries may be rebuffed.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Work with your older parent to collect information before a crisis occurs. Learn about current medical conditions and medications, the names and telephone numbers of doctors; determine financial status, including income, expenses, debts, location of bank accounts, credit card numbers, and other financial assets or liabilities. This is what you should be doing on a proactive basis.

Then, work as a team with the older parent, with siblings, and/or other concerned family members to discern whether the current and future needs are being met and whether one or more family members has the ability to assist directly (which often involves willingness as well as physical location) with personal care, meal preparation, transportation, household chores, etc. Finally, not only the older adult, but also all family members should be involved in anticipating and providing for "end-of-life decisions." An Advance Health Care Directive is an imperative. 📄