

□ CARING FROM ABROAD □

An increasing concern of Foreign Service families is facing the challenge of long-distance caring of parents or relatives while serving on a posting. Little exists as precedence to guide families through this sometimes lonely and stressful time.

The stresses and difficulties of long-distance caring can be significant. For most senior citizens and their families, the underlying fear is not seeing their loved ones again. Compounding the emotional stress of watching a parent's or relative's declining health is the logistical problem of making suitable arrangements while the Foreign Service family is away. Family conflicts may erupt between siblings over responsibilities for the care of parents while the posted son, daughter, or grandchildren may develop resentments stemming from their inability to nurture ongoing relationships with those they love. In order to deal with these problems, Foreign Service families need to prepare themselves. Preparation is one key to your family's peace of mind while away.

"The last thing you should do is wait until a crisis develops," says Suzanne Smith, executive director of the Placement Co-ordination Service of Ottawa-Carleton. "Many people can't think straight when their parent's condition worsens and they find they can no longer cope. You should be ready ahead of time and everything will be less stressful when the time comes."

Families will need to explore resources in the community where their relative lives. Mrs. Marjorie Caverly, Personnel Welfare Counsellor at External Affairs recommends that seniors be consulted and take part in the decision-making process. If placement for a family member is being investigated, take the person with you to get their perception of the facility, management and the residents.

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There are different levels of service depending on the clients needs. Smith says the expansion in home-care services has helped many seniors stay at home longer than they once could. "There's been a tremendous improvement in in-home health care services, and it allows people to maintain their independence, with a little outside help. We always say people should stay at home as long as they can, even if they need a little help."

The different levels of residential health care is determined by assessing the clients needs. Homes with residential care are for people who need up to 1.5 hours of care a day. Extended or nursing care is for people who need between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. Chronic care is for people who need at least three hours of care a day.

To determine the level of assistance clients need, the service arranges for a medical assessment, and for a public health nurse to assess how well the client is functioning. Keep in mind there are waiting lists for every level of care. For chronic care, waits can be a year or two.

Knowing your family member is properly cared for is one element of maintaining peace of mind while away. The other essential element for both the senior and adult child, is contact. Mrs. Caverly stresses the importance of regular news from the posted family. Frequent information from children and grandchildren is much more important than gifts. Regular news in the form of

cards and letters bridges the distance between families separated by continents and shortens the time between visits. Wherever possible, tape recorded messages sent between families provide a multi-dimensional dialogue where the loved ones share more than words; where voices, sounds, songs and laughter convey volumes. Volunteers or nurses can help Grandmother or Grandfather talk into the tape recorder and help mail the tape to family members.

People who want information on appropriate in-home services or nursing homes can contact provincial services, or in the Ottawa area you can call Suzanne Smith at the Placement Co-ordinating Service office at (613) 727-0132. Marjorie Caverly is available at Personnel Welfare Counselling Services, External Affairs at (613) 992-1641 if you need some guidance in becoming informed of resources available to you in the area where the concerned individual lives □

(Excerpts from the Ottawa Citizen, May 8, 1988.)

Trend in Canadian population over the age of 65

Date:	#000	% Population
1981	2.36	9.7%
1986	2.73	10.7%
1991	2.17	11.9%
1996	3.58	13.1%
2001	3.88	14.0%
2006	4.14	14.7%
2011	4.54	16.1%
2016	5.19	18.4%
2021	5.86	21.0%
2026	6.57	23.9%
2031	N/A	26.5%

Canada's aging population will create an inordinate demand on health care and hospitals in the future. This is demonstrated by the graph published February 15, 1986 in the Ottawa Citizen.