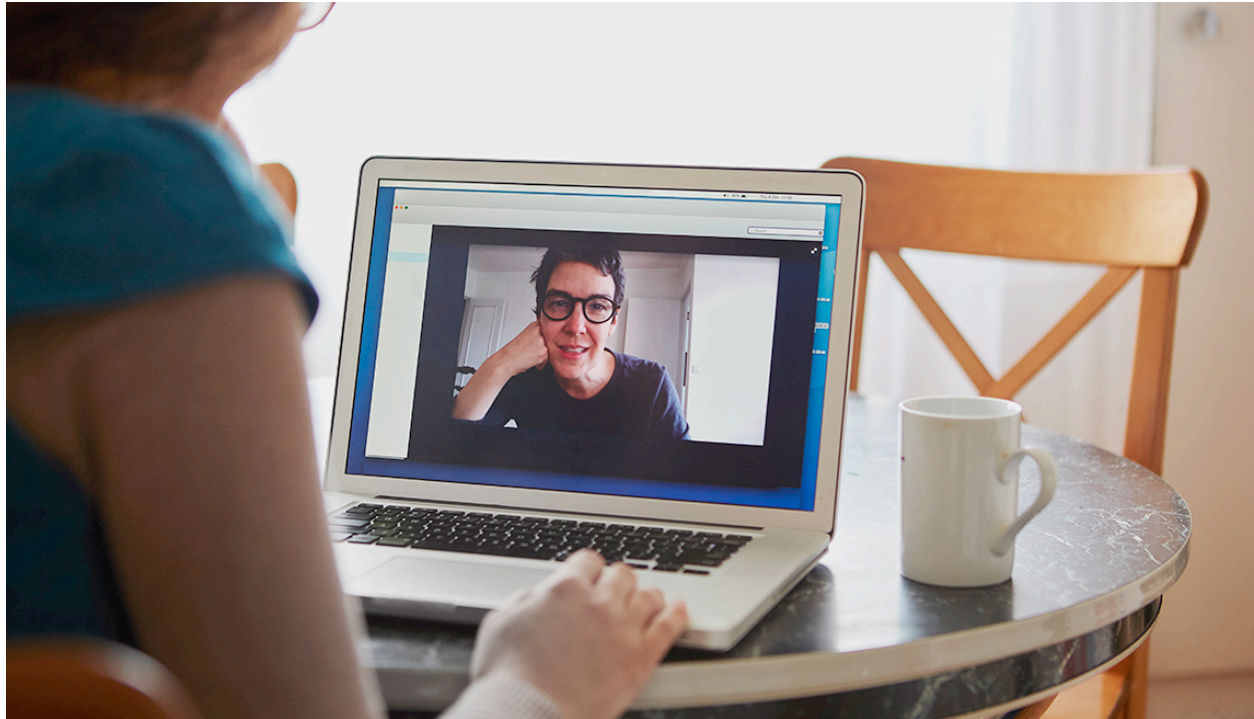


Caregiving in Times of Crisis

Planning for the unexpected is tough, but reacting without a plan is even harder

by Amanda Singleton, AARP, March 17, 2020



Getting to live in the Florida sunshine means dealing with the reality of hurricane season. When my mother spent her final months at an in-patient hospice facility, I promised I would ride out the storms with her for as long as I was allowed.

Year later, as Hurricane Irma bore down on the state, my husband, daughter and I headed south on an empty interstate as vehicles sat in traffic jams for days to evacuate north and away from the storm. We felt it necessary to be with his parents, as my father-in-law — who had been battling pancreatic cancer — was nearing the end of his life. If the storm had been a direct hit, we would at least have been there to help my mother-in-law care for him under catastrophic circumstances. Wild horses couldn't pull me away from the people I love, and I believe many caregivers feel the same way.

In the last weeks, our nation and world have been turned upside down by the COVID-19 outbreak, and we, collectively, are trying to quash its unprecedented spread. My heart is with the caregivers — those who are caring in isolation and weighing the risk of contact with others, without access to unrestricted medical care and losing the much-needed assistance of in-home

health and companion workers. I also feel for those who are separated from their facility-bound care partners. I have clients who are infirm or dying, and their caregivers simply don't know how to proceed. Though we are all figuring this out as it unfolds, here are some general considerations for caregivers of today and caregivers of the future when planning for, or responding to, a time of crisis.

Create a disaster plan

No matter where you live, have a disaster plan ready for your care partner. It may be tailored to specific seasons, as winter plans could differ dramatically from summer plans.

Your plan should include a written list of your care partner's current needs, routines and impairments. It should include all identifying information (date of birth, Social Security number and a current photo) as well as allergies, medications and diagnoses. Prepare a biography of your loved one that will better inform their providers of their personality, interests and background. This is especially important for medical conditions where a care partner may rely on a caregiver to be their "voice."

Consider emergency relocation

Consider where your care partner will relocate in the event of an emergency. Will that location be capable of providing assistive devices and durable medical equipment? Is there a special needs shelter near you that could work? If your care partner resides in a rural area, consider contacting the authorities to let them know your care partner (or you) may need a wellness check if they are isolated or hard to access.

Think about basic needs

Write a plan of action for other basic needs if your care partner will be sheltering in place. Will they have adequate foods, toiletries and medication? (Note that many pharmacies will provide refills early in times of emergency and that medication delivery is offered by many major retailers.) Can neighbors or charitable organizations contribute meals or supply donations?

Document communication

If you absolutely must leave your care partner in the hands of an assisted living or nursing home facility where you will have limited contact, my local probate and guardianship court offers these recommendations. First, make sure that the facility has your primary and alternative contact information. Specifically request that the facility keep you posted on any changes in your care partner's physical or emotional state and provide you with medical records to document all care that has been provided. Make every effort to communicate with your loved one by phone, video chat, notes or any other way possible to ensure that your loved one feels as safe as possible. During times of chaos and stress, it is always best to have detailed notes to refer to rather than rely solely on memory. The court emphasizes that you should document all these efforts so you have a good record.

Planning for the unexpected is never easy, but reacting to the unexpected is significantly more difficult. Although these steps may seem small in light of the large impact of an event like the coronavirus pandemic, they may provide some comfort and organization in times of uncertainty.