

KSPS

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LONG-DISTANCE CAREGIVING

If you live in another town or state from a loved one who needs care, you will face very specific challenges. How will you know that the person is getting the help he or she needs? These tips can help.

Make regularly scheduled visits. Depending on the level of independence, those visits could be occasional or frequent. Use your visits to assess the person's needs. You and other relatives or friends may be able to take turns visiting so the person is checked on regularly. If you cannot visit often, consider having someone who lives near the person take responsibility for care.

When you visit: Assess the person's ability to care for himself or herself. Check in about meals and self-care; shopping, errands, and household chores; medications and doctor's appointments; money management and bill-paying; driving and transportation; social activities; and mental or emotional health.

Arrange for help when needed. Ask the person what kind of care he or she needs or will accept. Be respectful of the person's lifestyle and independence. Ask health care providers, neighbors, and friends what type of care they think the person needs. They are closer and may see things that you won't notice during short visits. Help the person arrange care. He or she may not be able to do it alone.

Plan regular check-in times. Regular phone calls can be a good way to check in. If the person has a hearing problem and may not hear the phone ring, plan a specific time to call so he or she will know to answer. Or arrange for special phone equipment for the hearing impaired. When you talk, listen for any changes in the way he or she speaks or engages with you. For some people, e-mail and letters are also good ways to check in.

Enlist the support of local friends. Consider asking a friend, relative, or neighbor to look in on the person daily or weekly. Find people who live near your relative—friends, neighbors, or other relatives—who can be called in an emergency. Knowing that someone is nearby can help ease your concern. Consider paying the friend or relative for his or her time.

Get local information. Order a local phone book. Get the names and numbers of local services. Even if you do not need them now, you might later on. Keep a notebook with the names and phone numbers of doctors, landlord, power company, and other services for your loved one. Photocopy Social Security, Medicare, and insurance cards, and durable power of attorney documents. Then you will have the information ready if needed.

Connect with community resources. Meet with doctors and other care providers when you visit. Ask them to report any changes in your loved one's health. Contact local social services to see whether your loved one is eligible for assistance. Contact organizations, clubs, and religious communities that your loved one participates in and learn whether they have

support systems you can use. Contact local volunteer programs to see whether they can provide a volunteer to visit regularly. Consider registering your relative for a personal medical emergency alert system, such as an emergency button worn around the neck or on the wrist.

Finding help. The Eldercare Locator, a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging, is a toll-free number and Web site for identifying the information and referral services provided by states and Area Agencies on Aging. Call 800-677-1116 from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. central time, or visit www.eldercare.gov.

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CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON ‘PEARLS OF AGING’

The Kansas Department on Aging has scheduled its 2007 Conference on Aging Services, with a theme of “Pearls of Aging.” The conference will be May 2–3 at the Capitol Plaza Hotel and Maner Conference Center in Topeka, Kan.

The annual conference focuses on ways to address the needs and issues facing Kansas elders and ways to enhance their lives so they may age successfully. Participants will include service providers, professionals in the field of aging, substance abuse counselors, long-term care administrators and staff, mental health professionals, state agency employees, and Kansas elders. The public is welcomed and encouraged to attend.

The goals of the conference are promoting choices for seniors, encouraging healthful lifestyles, accessing current information for professionals, recognizing the pearls of aging, learning throughout your life, and stringing pearls of wisdom across the generations.

The conference is composed of breakout sessions in which small groups hear and interact with a variety of presenters, and sessions in which all participants listen to keynote presenters.

The featured speakers for the conference will be Thomas Perls, MD, who will address the question, Can we all live to 100? And if we could, would we want to? According to Perls, centenarians represent a new paradigm of aging: The older you get, the healthier you’ve been. Although genetics plays an important role in reaching 100, the centenarian study and its collaborators show us that most people should be able to live to their late 80s in exceptional health. These 25 to 30 years of good health beyond age 60 could mean a gold mine of possibilities and potential for today’s baby boomers and future generations.

The other keynote speaker will be Bowen F. White, MD, who will speak on “Why Normal Isn’t Healthy.” White will provide insights into the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of healthful, heartfelt living.

For more information, visit www.agingkansas.org or call 800-432-3535. The registration packet will be available at a later date.

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PROBLEMS OR CONCERNS WITH YOUR MEDICARE DRUG PLAN?

If you are having problems or concerns with your Medicare prescription drug plan, first call your plan provider's toll-free customer service number, which appears on the back of your identification card. Your plan provider's toll-free customer service number is also listed with information about the plans in the back of the Kansas version of *Medicare & You 2007*.

After you have talked with your plan provider, help is available if you are unable to resolve issues regarding your prescription drug plan. You may call Medicare 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 800-633-4227. You also may receive assistance from the Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK) program, accessible through your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). If you need assistance finding your AAA, visit www.agingkansas.org or call 800-432-3535.