

Lindsay works as a nurse at Charlton Lane Medical Centre.



When did you identify as a carer?

Working as a nurse, I know people like myself don't consider themselves carers because you're a husband, wife, son, or daughter, and you just see it as naturally caring for people. I guess you feel like a carer when it gets hard, when you feel it's a struggle.

About my caring roles experiences and work-life

My caring role stepped up when my mum was diagnosed with mixed dementia, I could see her getting frailer and needing more care. Before that my dad had dementia; at that point I was supporting mum and dad.

I work over 30 hours, Monday to Thursday. Sometimes quite long days because, as in lots of jobs, the job often takes longer than the hours that you've got to do it. I'm juggling caring with work as well as childcare for my four little grandsons.

In between all of that, I'm doing mum's shopping and washing among other things. Mum needs me to think for her all the time even to the extent of checking she's opened a window or even just made herself comfortable in her chair. That's why I'm so grateful for everything Crossroads Care Gloucestershire provide; they are a real godsend! It's such a relief to have lovely people going in to look after someone very special to you.

During my break at work, I make calls to or for mum. She has left the phone off the hook before, and I don't know whether she's collapsed. Her lifeline doesn't work when the phone is off the hook. **It's such stress while at work. There's so much time spent thinking and organising for the person you care for. The feeling of responsibility, that's the hardest thing.**

At my age now, you meet people and it's often the case that they have older relatives to support with many more people living longer. Many of my work colleagues have care responsibilities. In a way that's great because it's good peer support. That's a big thing being able to share and empathise with each other.

However, it's also tricky because we can't shoulder the extra work because everybody's in the same boat; we've all got lots of stresses.

Is your employer aware of your caring role?

I did make my employer aware of my care role just in case I needed any urgent compassionate leave. Luckily, I've got pretty good managers. There's trust; I think they know I would only ever take time if it was an absolute emergency. Then again, I haven't yet taken any additional leave.

I see managers that are not so compassionate. Managers that don't have childcare responsibilities and don't understand you can't just find alternative care if your child is sick and it's no different with caring for older people. When mum needs somebody to advocate for her, I'm the only one that's there to do it, there isn't an alternative.

Recently, I've had a change of managers neither have care responsibilities. However, since COVID there's more recognition that staff wellbeing needs to be looked after, otherwise more staff are going to be off sick with stress.

My employer offers Carers Leave but I'm not sure about the legal position of how much you're entitled to. Considering, that with old and frail people you can be called up for numerous falls or admissions to hospitals, the leave entitlement is unlikely to be enough. Any time given is down to the discretion of your manager. You are a bit stuffed if you've got a manager that really doesn't have any understanding.

In health and care services there's far too much work and not enough people to do it; understandably managers are under pressure. This can lead to managers putting stress on the staff and they're less keen to let you have that compassionate leave. Stress just sort of goes down the line.

What challenges do you face as a working carer?

Pressure

On one occasion my dad was admitted to the hospital, I took my computer with me to try to write up a work assessment while the paramedics were there. Looking back now, what was I thinking, why didn't I just put my life and caring responsibilities first? But it's easier said than done when you've got a good work ethic. **It's an immense pressure because you have a duty to do your job but you also have a duty to your family.**

You put in all the hours and more, doing as good a job as you can, but putting a lot of pressure on yourself. I feel I must be seen working hard and I shouldn't feel like that really. I've been working for more than 40 years.

Guilt

I've always had good appraisals and regular supervisions. Sometimes the topic of care comes up, but it's difficult with caring because it goes on and on and on. It's not just one crisis, it's continual. This makes it tricky for managers to give a bit of leeway more than once or twice.

For example, mum had all sorts of dental problems which has been a nightmare. For every appointment I need to go with her. An hour or two at the dentist is a lot out of a working day. The dentists don't realise how much hassle it is and they expect you to come back again and again around their availability.

That's hard with work because it's not a one-off, it might be lots of appointments and things to juggle week in and week out. You feel guilty because more treatment is needed so you feel like you must make time to do it, even if you haven't got any. Being a nurse, I see the other side; people wait for appointments for months. If they need to cancel, then they're waiting another three months. The services across the board are quite inflexible, adding to the pressure on carers.

Time

Everybody feels like they can cope and wait till they're at breaking point to seek help. In my work, I tell carers they need to have time out and look after themselves. But equally I'm thinking when on earth have I got the time to do that?

I say to people in my role, have you applied for your attendance allowance? Have you done your power of attorney? Yet I know how overwhelming that is because it's just more things to fit in. I think to myself "when would I have time for a carers' assessment"? Your needs get lower and lower down the priority list even though you know it'll be good for you, it's just so hard to get around everything.

Financial

Often people are unaware of the legislation and don't know about things like Attendance Allowance. Many are supporting those they care for financially. **To a degree there's a financial cost to me, things you don't sort of count, every appointment you take is extra fuel costs. It's a lot of taxiing around and picking up shopping, all of which is a financial burden that some people are not in a position to absorb.**

It would be helpful to reduce my hours and retire ideally. I know financially it will affect my pension badly, but it may come to that. I may just have to take that financial knock and reduce hours.

If you're a working carer who recognises some of the experiences in the story above then contact us today!

Crossroads Care Gloucestershire can support you with adult respite and information about your rights and those you look after.



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For more information or for an informal chat call Jessica on: 01452 933503 or email: workingcarers@crossroadscareglos.org.uk

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