

My Caregiving Journey from Yester-years



I am one of the caregivers to my parents and parents-in-law, since the late 1970s to the turn of the century. During those years, looking after elder persons was less common compared to recent years. Looking after persons suffering from stroke and dementia was difficult if not a mammoth task. Domestic helpers with experience in looking after elder persons with special needs were few and far between.

It was during that era that I was a part-time caregiver to my in-laws and parents over a period of about 30 years. While I was still holding on to a full-time mid-management and demanding job and climbing the corporate ladder, I was entrusted with the unimaginable role of sending my then to-be mother-in-law for her regular medical appointments at the clinics. Due to stroke, I had to carry her whole body weight as we walked from the carpark to the clinic. Without adequate training on supporting a patient with stroke, each step was slow, cautious and calculated so as not to trip and fall. I used to worry about supporting her and would be overjoyed whenever there were seats available to rest and catch my breath. Even when she was under the care of nurses, she would demand for our presence and would resort to behaviours such as biting the nurses to gain attention. Back then, I did not realise that those behaviours were her ways to “communicate” her needs.



As I have some knowledge on nutrition, it used to annoy me whenever her children brought her unhealthy food which caused her discomfort later on. However, after she passed on, it was hard overcoming my strong sense of guilt as I wonder whether her quality of life could have been affected by my actions of not allowing her to enjoy her favourite food, and depriving her of the little enjoyment in her remaining time.

I am very grateful for the training that I have received from joining the Para-Counsellor team at the Tsao Foundation as a volunteer. As I reflected, I realised that my siblings and I had made some silly mistakes in taking care of our aged parents. Back then, we didn't know and did not receive medical advice that my mother was suffering from dementia. Her repetitive “abnormal” behaviours, inability to recognise us, constantly getting lost, and our lack of understanding of her condition resulted in us being anxious, worried, angry, fearful, confused and helpless. With the trainings and guidance from the programme, I was assured that some aspects of my caregiving were correct. Despite all odds, we had tried our best to care for her. If times were better then, I would believe that we could have cared for my mother more adequately. My caregiving experience has motivated me to volunteer in eldercare related activities such as the Para-Counsellor Programme at Tsao Foundation for the past 10 years.



As for now, I enjoy working with older persons, and hope that the merits that I may accrue as a result of my voluntary work and spiritual efforts would be shared with my deceased parents and parents-in-laws, and may they be well and happy wherever they are at the present moment.



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