

What does COVID-19 tell us about the Caregivers?

For the longest time, caregiving for the elderly has been largely concerned with the person's physical well-being (e.g. safety, health, and function), and to achieve this through the physical presence of a caregiver. This is true whether the care is provided by family members, formal or informal caregivers.



However, this traditional way of caregiving was forced to accept a big makeover on 7 April 2020. Close and extended duration

contacts had to be reduced or even stopped. Children could no longer swing by to support their parents. Domestic helpers were discouraged from bringing their ah ma and ah gong for their daily neighbourhood strolls. Healthcare workers had to reduce their close engagements with their clients. Many older persons grew bored, lonely and anxious when their familiar routines were disrupted.

Nevertheless, there is always sunshine behind every dark cloud. Through the COVID-19 experience, caregivers have learnt and adapted. Besides increasing emphasis on hygiene, safe-distancing, wearing of masks, caregivers also started to pay more attention to the emotional well-being of the person whom they are caring for. Caregivers are learning that (1) physical presence may be replaced in part by spiritual connections, i.e. presence of understanding, love and respect, delivered at a distance (such as through a few thoughtful words or gestures), and that (2) quality of an engagement is just as important (if not more so) than its duration and frequency. Both caregivers and their charges have also discovered new communication tools (e.g. social media and new mobile applications) to maintain connection with each other and make online grocery and food purchases. These tools used to be considered as domains of the younger generations only, but are no longer so, as many older persons are more digitally empowered and connected now.

Push comes to shove, amidst all natural and man-made disasters, the human kind has always been able to find ways to evolve and thrive. The COVID-19 highlights this amazing human trait of resilience yet again, this time round, with our caregivers leading in the forefront to establish the new normal.

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