

Many miles away:

Caring for older relatives while on the mission field



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Echoes International

 **ECHOES
INTERNATIONAL**
Together with joy

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How do I care for an elderly relative when I live several thousand miles away?

There is no clear cut or indeed 'right' way to approach this sensitive subject.

Each situation is unique.

There are as many different family circumstances as there are mission partners, so standardising advice is impossible. Different areas of the UK can also have different policies. However, there are general guidelines which could help you to move in the right direction and give you more peace of mind.

The subject of the possible need to return to the UK to set up care, or indeed to become a carer, is better discussed in advance. Whether it be for a short or longer period, asking relevant questions can help clarify the situation for all involved.

- To what extent would this return impact your ministry?
- Will you need accommodation or transport?
- Does this give you an added financial burden?
- What spiritual and/or practical help can your commending church provide?

Support from your fellowship

We would encourage you to have an open discussion on the issue of elderly parents with your commending church. Those responsible may be unaware of the pressure you face. It is important for you to be able to share this so they can pray alongside you, give counsel where appropriate and perhaps practical help if your parents live locally.

Care Needs Assessment

If your relative lives in the UK they are entitled, under the Care Act (2014), to a 'Care Needs Assessment' from their local authority.

Step 1

- Contact the local council's Adult Social Care Department to request a Care Needs Assessment. Everyone is entitled to this assessment and the local authority have the responsibility to carry one out for anyone who appears to require care and support. However, that does not mean your relative will be eligible for help.

Assessment procedures vary but they follow national criteria to decide who is eligible for care and support They will have to consider three questions in making their decision:

1. *Does the person have care and support needs as a result of a physical or mental condition?*
2. *Are they unable to achieve **two or more** desired goals or outcomes as a result of your care and support needs?*
3. *Is there, or likely to be, a significant impact on their wellbeing?*

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/arranging-care/care-needs-assessment/>

- If you are already caring for your relative (or a member of your family is) you/they can be classed as an informal carer and are therefore entitled to a 'Carers Assessment' under the Care Act (2014). This could help provide respite opportunities to the carer and, if they meet the criteria, additional financial benefits too.

Step 2

- Once the Care Needs Assessment has been carried out, and if your relative is eligible, you should receive an individualised care plan outlining needs identified and how they can be met.
- Part of the assessment will have assessed finances.
 - If the relative can afford care themselves, social care will not be sourcing a package of care for your relative
 - A contribution may have to be paid towards the care package.

Step 3

- There are many amazing charities that can support individuals. Obviously, many are local or only in one part of the UK.
- Age UK have both a national and regional presence so can help any family wherever they are in the UK.
 - There is very helpful information on their website regarding the care needs assessment process [Help finding and arranging social care for the elderly | Age UK](#)
 - They also have fact sheets and guides, which are very useful [Age UK factsheets and information guides | Age UK](#)
 - Age UK Advice Line: 0800 678 1602 (lines are open 8am-7pm, 365 days a year) is available for people to ring for advice and can signpost you to the appropriate regional branch to get information unique to your area.

A relative may not meet the Local Council criteria for intervention despite the family feeling that they do. For example, if an individual cannot get into the bath but they can strip-wash at the sink, it may be considered they do not have a personal care need, as strip-washing is deemed adequate. If this is your case, you can get advice from Age UK who should be able to inform you of charities active in your area.

IMPORTANT: Unless the relative is in crisis or dying, **this process takes time!** The outcomes are numerous and not always what you may hope for or expect. Remember however, that the Care Needs Assessment is merely the starting point.



So, when should you start off the process?

We would encourage you to start thinking about this **as early as possible** or simply lay groundwork now to build upon later.

It can be difficult and challenging to broach the sensitive issue of future care planning and have meaningful conversations about this with your parents and other family members. It is very important, however, to discuss their wishes **BEFORE** the crisis or the need arises.

Examples of questions to be raised.

- **Do they want to stay at home or go into a care home?**
- **Have they made a will?**
- **Who is going to look after their pet(s) if they can no longer do it?**

It is also important to think about paperwork that may be needed in the future.

- Has the parent organised power of attorney for health and finance? (very important to arrange this whilst the elderly parent has capacity to do so to avoid costly and lengthy legal procedures.) The following link will guide you through the necessary steps. <https://www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney>
- It may be worth requesting a benefits check for elderly parents (through Age UK or Citizens Advice) as there are benefits specifically for those in pensionable age to help them remain at home ([Browse: Carers and disability benefits - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)).
- You could also have a key safe fitted on the elderly relative's property, to allow access to health professionals and carers, etc.

So, consider how to make it easier for services to communicate with you, i.e., provide email addresses, provide numbers to call and what time to call, etc. Anything that makes it easier for services to communicate with overseas relatives makes a huge difference



Here is a recent example of an overseas relative coping with care for his elderly parent.

The patient's son, who has power of attorney, lives in America. He managed to have the patient's home number diverted to his mobile in America. It was stated on the patient's record to ring after 3pm (for time difference purposes), which greatly helped health professionals to communicate with the son.

To summarize:

1. Request a 'Care Needs Assessment' through the local council adult social care department (and request a carer's assessment if appropriate).
2. Go through care plan identified by the care needs assessment and get support for next steps from local council or charities (such as Age UK) to arrange best support for each individual situation going forward.

Some helpful things to consider:

1. **Be proactive** - start having conversations with family and elderly relatives now and do not wait until the situation becomes such that decisions have to be rushed.
2. **Get organised** - what paperwork could be put in place ahead of time, such as power of attorney and benefit checks?
3. **Be creative** - How can you help services to communicate with you overseas, i.e., provide email addresses, phone numbers and time differences, etc.?
4. **Put support in place** - If not at the stage for a care needs assessment yet, get advice from charities (such as Age UK) to find out what support is available locally.
5. **Communicate with your commending church** - Make your commending church aware of the situation as early as possible. Talk your options through with them and seek their support and advice.
6. **Keep Echoes International or your Mission Support Agency informed** - Counsel and encouragement are vital for you at this time. The effect of these family issues on your ministry and the possible absence from the field will also need to be discussed.