Providing care for a loved one for the second time in recent years can put a strain on the family

Informal care of a parent or family member within your own home can be difficult, as the boundaries between providing care and other aspects of life can become blurred sometimes. This can be complicated by personal commitments that make it necessary to share the workload with other family members. In her full time occupation this carer is a physiotherapist that works with children. Having previously cared for her own mother who suffered from dementia, this carer now cares for her mother in law, who is 92 and has become frail and increasingly immobile.

Caring for her own mother, before currently caring for her mother in law has presented a different set of challenges due to the nature of their conditions. This case is interesting as this carer is able to compare the two situations of mental and then physical debilitation. For this carer, making the time to step away from her care responsibilities and role in the family can be difficult sometimes, yet finds it necessary to have time out and recharge, this can be made more difficult if the care receiver is immobile. As this carer's husband is retired and she works part time, providing care for a parent has become quite tying in a stage of their lives where they could have enjoyed increased flexibility. The pressure associated with having a family member who needs full time care can become an issue, as this carer still works she feels as though she is constantly under pressure, at both work and home. Despite her mother in law's declining mobility, they both still make effort to keep the mother in law as mobile as possible which has been important for both of them.

"We've got that support network but somebody who's by themselves you know like a mum or a son looking after a parent. They wouldn't necessarily have that I think there it's essential that everything goes ok so that they have some support network (….) important".

Despite hardships, providing care for her mother in law can be very rewarding from a family perspective, our carer enjoys the fact that there is 3 generations of family in her home. Although the mother in law's use of the front room takes some space, she fully engages with those that come to the family home and her own friends visit often, which creates an open house atmosphere. She enjoys this support from her friendship network, who visit the home regularly and this makes being tied to home most of the time feel like less of an issue. Having the mother in law in the home opens up the number of people coming to the house and relationships have been built with medical professionals. Although this carer has not mentioned any of her own financial hardship, she does acknowledge how a lack of money could make life very difficult if twenty four hour per day care is necessary for a family member and there is no steady income.

Being an informal carer for a family member requires patience and empathy, these traits factor heavily into being an effective carer and is also necessary to avoid stress and conflict for both the carer and the care receiver. Due to the informal nature of her care, our carer has not received any training in care. However, in this case, due to her physiotherapy background she has a good level of transferrable skills that have been developed throughout her career. This means that maintaining mobility for her mother and then mother in law has always been a focus to prevent muscle wastage. From this case, it is clear that the successful performance of the carer hasn't been down to training but actively engaging the care receiver emotionally and physically whenever possible.

"… [In relation to considering external services] all the physical needs are being dealt with but the mental needs are not being addressed or in terms of their mobility needs none of those can possibly be addressed. Those are the things that add to the quality of life and that's something that I really felt strongly about and I hope I can try and do for my mother-in-law";