



Q&A with a caregiving expert

By Ellen Waldman

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In the early days of this column, I occasionally included interviews that I called “Expert in the Field.” Because we are all relying on the sound advice of experts these days, it seemed like the right time to once again ask an expert.

Many people have wondered in this age of COVID-19 how to manage caring for a loved one, or even meeting their own needs, while living at home. I spoke to Brooke Fredericks, owner and managing director of Right at Home Southern Oregon (541-414-0800; brooke@rahsouthernoregon.net), one of the many licensed and bonded caregiving agencies in the valley.

Ellen: What has changed for in-home caregiving agencies since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

Brooke: A lot. We’ve taken on many new clients, as family members are keeping their loved ones at home to protect them during this pandemic. Many private caregivers working in the community chose to self-quarantine, and we are filling in those gaps. But mostly our clients are happy to be home with the caregivers they’re used to seeing regularly. Families are appreciative that we’re there to help.

Ellen: What changes have you made to minimize exposure to COVID-19 for your clients?

Brooke: We are following CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidelines, Oregon OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) guidelines, and the Oregon governor’s office guidelines, among others. Additionally, as a locally owned franchise of a global company, we receive a tremendous amount of support from our corporate Right at Home office. We have daily briefings about best practices, and our corporate office has helped to provide much-needed supplies, including gloves and masks. We provide health screening for our caregivers and clients at the beginning of each shift. We offer extra training for our caregivers on infection control and COVID-19. We wash our hands with soap and water as a first choice, and hand sanitizer as a second choice. We wear masks when in close contact with our clients. We are paying particular attention to physical/social distancing and reporting changes in conditions. Our office staff has also been trained on how to handle illness-related concerns. We’ve made active use of interactive technology, both in the office and in consultation with clients and families.

Ellen: Have you been able to obtain the personal protective equipment you need?

Brooke: We were fortunate to have enough gloves right from the start. Additionally, the corporate Right at Home office shipped us our first box of PPE, including masks and gloves.

Ellen: What kinds of activities are your clients and caregivers doing during this quarantine?

Brooke: Actually, they’re many of the same activities everyone else is engaged in now. They are helping with the usual daily tasks such as meal preparation, bathing, grooming, dressing, and help with medications. In addition, they are gardening, cooking favorite meals, connecting with family via FaceTime and letter writing, taking walks, looking at family photos, taking drives through the

countryside, playing games, listening to music, searching the internet for interesting articles, etc. Most importantly, they are doing these things together.

Ellen: What has been the most rewarding part of all this?

Brooke: We are fortunate that our work in and of itself involves keeping our vulnerable population at home, which minimizes their risk of exposure. Listening, coming up with creative solutions, implementing those solutions, and having meaningful interactions with clients, families, caregivers and community partners has been rewarding. And we are grateful for one another. It is a very special time to be working together, and I'm truly blessed to see this happening every day, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Thanks to Brooke for this great information. Let me add something here. One thing that's important to mention is that isolation is unhealthy, even under normal circumstances. Right now, if you're caring for someone at home and need some extra help, consider a caregiver as a viable option. If you're living alone, there are many benefits from having companionship or help with tasks around the home. Hiring a caregiver can support you as well. No one has to go this alone. We are really all in this together.