

Help for working carers

The challenge

There are more than three million employees who currently have to balance work and caring responsibilities and almost two million of those people work full time, according to a report called Supporting Working Carers from Government, business and Carers UK. But, without getting the right support at work, as well as at home for the people they care for, many carers face having to reduce their hours or giving up work altogether. Fortunately, alongside a supportive work environment, technologies like telecare (sensors and alarms used in the home, linked to a monitoring service) can help carers combine work and care.

Paula's story

Paula works in Tunstall's monitoring centre, Response. Response employees answer alarm calls and provide telehealth and telecare monitoring to a wide range of individuals and organisations across the UK, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Paula monitors calls for assistance and is part of a team responsible for maintaining the high quality of the service.

Over the years, Paula has dealt with thousands of calls. But nothing brought home the impact of her work quite like the time her own mum used the service. At the time, Paula had cared for her mum for three years and was balancing caring with her full-time job at Response.

"Mum hid her dementia for years. We just thought she was getting a bit forgetful. I worried about her when I was at work, so I asked if I could have my mobile phone available to me. Soon Mum began to ring me while I was at work to ask where she'd left things. Of course, this would interrupt my working day and, as you can imagine, that's not easy with a job like mine. Everyone at Tunstall was very supportive though and told me not to worry. Later on, when I had to take time off work, they were absolutely fine about that too. I really cannot fault them. Yet still I would feel guilty about taking time off or going to answer my phone at work."

“ It can be really hard to manage several difficult situations simultaneously...”

says Paula, whose mum has vascular dementia, Alzheimer's disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).



Paula combined caring for her mum with a full-time job

"Mum did wear a pendant," says Paula, referring to the personal telecare alarm worn by her mum. "She even pressed the button a couple of times. Not because she'd fallen but because she couldn't breathe. We actually took her call in Response, and they were on it in a breath. In fact, I reckon they had the ambulance first responder down to her within minutes..."

"Technology can definitely help..."

"My advice to other carers would be to let your employer know as soon as possible," suggests Paula. "Also, share caring with others instead of taking it all on yourself, so let other people in to help you. It's about sharing the load, really, both physically and emotionally, because you can easily be brought down yourself otherwise. At the end of the day, if you don't look after yourself you cannot look after someone else."

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