

# Our Chief Officer reflects on respite

Everyone needs a change from time to time, whether it's for an hour, a day or longer. This is especially true for carers as caring can be exhausting both physically and mentally.

Having a break can improve our wellbeing and allow us time to look after ourselves so that we can keep well. If you've ever had a break abroad, one of the first things the flight attendants will mention is your safety and what to do in an emergency. The part that always sticks in my mind is when they tell you to put your own oxygen mask on first and then attend to your child. This goes so against the grain but it's very, very true. When you care for someone, you must take care of yourself first in order to be able to care for others. This is why it's so important to take responsibility for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing.

It is well documented that despite the satisfaction and sense of fulfilment carers can gain from their caring role, being a carer can be incredibly stressful and can adversely affect carers' social lives and their physical and emotional health. Especially in the long-term, social isolation amongst carers is frequently highlighted along with higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety plus physical health problems. Family conflict and negative feelings such as anger and frustration are also common.

This is why I believe carers should always be supported to look after their own wellbeing in order to minimise any adverse effects.

Respite is of course one form of support and, at its most rigid, refers to a range of services including, replacement care for the cared for person, either in a dedicated facility or in their own home, or perhaps a sitting service. It is often offered as part of a package of care but may also be provided on an informal basis. It can bring peace of mind, allowing carers to relax and worry less. It gives carers a chance to rest and quite often gives them the opportunity to catch up with everyday tasks, social activities and even employment.

However, we also know that the impact can be complex. On the one hand, breaks may give carers a sense of normality, freedom and relief but may also lead to feelings of guilt and anxiety.

I genuinely believe that respite provision of this kind is invaluable but I also believe that we need to be more creative when we consider how to arrange breaks from a caring role.

Having a break doesn't always need to be away from the cared for. It could be something as simple as an afternoon out together such as fish and chips by the beach. It could be 10 minutes out of the daily routine. Time out from caring should be flexible and tailored and completely unique to the individual. ~ *Llinos*