

Caregiver meets caregiver-friendly workplace

by Lyn Stuart

Every caregiver has a moment when life shifts in a direction you never saw coming.

For me, that moment arrived on March 23rd 2024, when my mom experienced a sudden medical emergency that placed her in the ICU and altered the course of our lives instantly.

What we assumed would be a short hospital stay quickly transformed into a long, complicated and still mysterious medical journey. She underwent multiple surgeries, faced repeated infections and battled episodes of sepsis that threatened her life more than once. It was an overwhelming, disorienting chapter none of us expected.

My mom had always been strong, vibrant, steady and fiercely independent. At seventy-three, she was still young at heart, needing little more than her daily vitamins to stay healthy. As a former nurse, she understood illness and recovery better than most, which made her sudden decline even harder to comprehend. Her body endured so much that she eventually had to relearn the simplest parts of living – walking, eating and trusting her body again. Some days brought incredible progress, others unraveled without warning, leaving us breathless.

Throughout it all, I stood beside her as daughter, advocate, cheerleader and steady presence. On good days, I was her Scrabble partner and crossword buddy. On the hard days, I was her voice when she couldn't speak for herself.

Caring for her was the honour of a lifetime. Yet, like countless caregivers, **I didn't stop being everything else I already was**. I was still a mother, a wife, a friend and a Caregiver Support Coordinator.

I was living the caregiving experience while supporting others walking their own versions of it, holding every role at once and trying not to lose myself in the process. I managed to keep going not because I was a superhero, but because of the support around me and what my workplace made possible during this impossible period.

Four things, in particular, changed everything for me:

- First, they gave me **true choice**: the freedom to decide when, where and how I could work as my mother's condition shifted. That choice helped me maintain a sense of identity when everything else felt shaped by crisis.
- Second, they offered **unwavering trust**. They didn't question my commitment or ask me to prove anything. They trusted that I understood my responsibilities and would give what I could. That trust lifted enormous pressure and allowed me to contribute without guilt.
- Third, they offered simple but meaningful **human check-ins**, reminders that I wasn't carrying everything alone.
- Fourth, they allowed me to show up as **a whole person**. I didn't have to separate the caregiver from the employee, daughter from professional. They made space for all of it, and it gave me the strength to keep going.

Work looked very different during those months. I joined meetings from ICU family rooms, answered calls from quiet hospital hallways and caught up on notes at my mother's bedside while she slept. Some nights, when fear kept me awake, I worked a little to steady myself. Other days, when everything fell apart, I stepped away completely. My employer's support created a safety net that allowed me to keep choosing both caregiving and meaningful work without sacrificing either.

Supporting caregivers every day has given me a deep understanding of why so many continue working while caregiving, even when demands are overwhelming. For me, work became a lifeline. It reminded me that I could still be capable, still contribute and still exist in a world beyond the hospital walls. It helped me hold onto a sense of purpose and normalcy at a time when nothing felt predictable or secure. That was only possible because **my workplace created the conditions that made working realistic for me**. They adapted when I needed flexibility. They trusted me to recognize my limits. They believed I could hold multiple roles without failing at either.

Looking back on those nine months, I understand something essential: caregivers do not stay in their jobs because it is easy.

They stay because their workplaces make it possible, because they are trusted, supported and allowed to be whole people carrying whole lives. I am profoundly grateful for the compassion that helped me survive that chapter, and I believe every caregiver deserves the same understanding.



Photo: Lyn and her mom Wendy, on their first day pass, weeks into admission, arranging flowers from Wendy's garden