



What happens if you need to become a carer?

You've made plans, set a budget and financial goals; you're ready for anything, right? But what happens if a loved one is in an accident or your ageing parent starts needing dedicated care? How do you juggle career and the role of carer?

Registered Nurse, Rachel James, had packed her bags and was five days away from a big new move to Singapore when she got the call; her 22-year-old daughter, Emily, had suffered a fall while snowboarding in America, breaking her neck and rendering her quadriplegic. In an instant, their worlds turned upside down.

Rachel's first reaction was one of shock and disbelief. "There's sadness and a degree of panic about how you're going to do this. There was also some grief about losing an imagined future. Then it settles into a heightened level of stress where you think, 'How am I going to manage this?'"

In Australia, there are 2,698,700 carers – 12% of the population, and one in 8 Australian employees are carers.

Know your rights at work

Juggling work and caring can be difficult and, without adequate support, carers report greater strain on their work and life - a struggle that can impact their health as well as their productivity at work.

After the initial chaos and confusion had subsided, Rachel approached her previous employer to discuss re-entering her role as a practice nurse.

"Carers come into a distinct group within HR, and there are policies and entitlements so you can work optimally including paid and unpaid carers' leave," she says.

"You also have the right under the Fair Work Act to request flexible working arrangements. I started with just one Saturday a week, took on another day when things had settled down more and ultimately transitioned to more days later down the track."

Tips for negotiating?

"Be assertive, be honest, endeavour to be flexible, have a realistic attitude in your ability to manage dual roles, and be a realist," she says. "When I was honest with myself and my manager, there was really productive dialogue. She doesn't ask me to perform tasks that are impractical for me. That's really positive."

Rachel also recommends setting a date to re-evaluate the arrangement to address any issues. "You may not get it right the first time and it's helpful to have a date when you can revisit it"

Rachel strongly recommends aiming for a genuine balance.

Outsourcing tasks

Outsourcing part of the carer role is central to enjoying work, says Rachel. "You're rarely alone in caring; there are usually family and friends who are happy to take over while you do your shopping, for instance."

She also recommends having a 'pyramid of communication'. "So you have five people you email if you need to get a message out there, and those people disseminate the information to the wider friends and family."

Financial assistance

Rachel recommends investigating National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding to see if you're entitled to receive the help of a paid carer in the home or special equipment, like a hoist or commode. "Get going as soon as possible to get things rolling. You have to be prepared for the long haul and just keep filling in the paperwork and jumping through the hoops."

She also suggests contacting Centrelink to ask about a carer allowance. "Also, visit Carer Gateway (carergateway.com.au) or contact your local council to see if there are nearby carers' support groups with resources on offer."

Look after yourself

"For me, post-traumatic recovery and resilience is about your mental health. Look after yourself because the person you care for doesn't want you to be lost. I genuinely think that balance is achievable. You can have a career and care but you have to give yourself a break. Having a good work/life balance is the bottom line."

Resources

In Australia, there are 2,698,700 carers – 12% of the population, and one in 8 Australian employees are carers.

If you or a friend needs assistance, the below resources are a good start.

Carers Australia: 1800 242 636

Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737

Source: Colonial First State

We will guide you with a tailored approach that works for your circumstances. Give us a call on 4927 4588 (Rockhampton) or 4939 1766 (Yeppoon) to see how we can help.



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