

Living Caring Working

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH A LIFE THREATENING ILLNESS,
THEIR FAMILIES, CARERS AND COMMUNITIES

RESOURCE 10 | Understanding the experience of your work colleague

Working with someone who is caring for someone with a life threatening illness can be a very confronting experience. You may not know what to say or how to interact with your colleague.

Here is some information to help you understand your work colleague.

As a carer, being able to work is important because it helps to:

- maintain an important part of their identity
- keep a sense of order and control in an uncertain environment
- earn income to pay for treatment
- provide for their family
- engage in social interaction to prevent isolation.

In addition to their paid work, carers may undertake the following:

- home nursing care
- purchasing and administering medication
- preparing appropriate meals or nourishment
- personal assistance with bathing, dressing, feeding, mobility around the home
- transport and assistance to meet medical appointments
- decision-making and organising the ill person's life (e.g. finances, accommodation, income [pensions, insurance, superannuation]), all of which can be difficult, time-consuming and stressful.

With these extra responsibilities, carers may suffer from the following:

- loss of physical strength
- fatigue
- loss of concentration
- forgetfulness
- grief reactions—depression, shock, anger, sadness.

Here are some ways you can help support your work colleague.

Offer your support

- Support can be offered in a tangible way, such as offering to get lunch for your colleague. Support can also be shown by just listening to your colleague. Ask your colleague how you can best support them.

Show your respect

- Show that you care and are interested without prying for details.
- Accept the choices they make without trying to influence them or provide advice.