

21 March 2023

Caring: expecting the unexpected

For Women's History Month, Esther blogs about caring responsibilities, which can come with costs to finances, career and lifestyle.

You don't know when you will get the call, but you know it will come. For me the call came last week. My elderly mother had a fall and was taken to hospital. I don't live in the same area, so this required rearranging work, a long drive to her home and then to the hospital. I got there just before she was moved to another hospital further away for surgery. I now travel over 60 miles each day to see her and work flexibly. We do not know the timeframe for recovery, the aftercare required or what will be provided.

The experience made me realise the additional financial impact on those with caring responsibilities. Additional expenses include petrol, car parking tickets and items needed for a hospital stay. This is before any adjustments are made for my mum to return home. With the cost-of-living crisis and pay increases well below the rate of inflation for years, this is an additional financial hit for people with caring responsibilities, adding financial worries to an already stressful situation.

What is helping me now is a sympathetic line manager, a flexible working policy and a job where I can work from different locations (office, home or other) with a laptop and Wi-Fi.

What would help more is additional support for caring – financial, practical and information. More special leave and emergency leave, review of policies and awareness raising of caring responsibilities, and signposting to external sources of financial help and support for elder care.

When caring for children, elderly relatives, family members with disabilities or anyone who needs medical treatment, you have to expect the unexpected. You can't plan for it. There is always a cost, in time and money. Caring responsibilities fall mainly, though not exclusively, on women. It is a workplace issue and union issue. We need a strong union, with more women being active members to improve the situation for carers so they are not disadvantaged or disproportionately impacted.