

Top Tips – Nurse Alex McAfee

I'm Alex McAfee and I am one of the clinical nurse-specialists for cancer. My area of speciality is liver, pancreas and the biliary system.

There are a variety of hints that I would give to anyone who is a carer, and I think the first one that I would mention is to prioritise. Don't try and juggle everything else and care for your loved one - it's too difficult. Decide what's important, and put everything else on hold.

Independence. It's very tempting, as a carer, to do everything for your loved one, but I would suggest that it's a better way forward if you encourage your loved one to be as independent as they can be, for as long as they can be.

Be honest. Don't try and protect your loved one from the truth. Open and honest conversations will be of very great value, not just to your loved one but to you and the wider family circle.

Remember this: time is the most precious gift that any one of us has, and you don't get it back, and you can't buy it, so be wise with the time, and particularly the time that you have with your loved one.

Mind time. Make time for yourself. That is so important. Don't neglect yourself. Get plenty of sleep if you can. Go out for a short walk every day. If you can manage to get time, then see friends, go for a coffee, read a book, do all those things that make you feel well and give you, even for a brief period of time, a sense of normality. It is so important that you keep yourself well, in every sense of the word. It will make you a much better carer.

Accept help from friends who are trusted, not just by you but by your loved one. Family members – take their help, let them in, don't close them out. And if you're in that position where you maybe don't have family members or friends who are stepping forward to help, there are other services in the community where you can get that help. The Macmillan information and support centres can be a great source of what's happening in your local area.

Your GP, your clinical nurse-specialist, we're there for both you and for your loved one. We know how difficult it can be. Many of us have been carers ourselves for loved ones, so we have walked the path that you are walking now and we're there to help. No question is stupid. No question is too small. Always feel free to ring us, pick our brains, ask us for help. Even if you just want to chat, always feel free.