Barbara O’Connell knows how important ‘the little things’ are. Spending time with her husband, Tom, and their
dog, Yoda, is one of them. But moments like these are increasingly rare for Barbara. Tom is living with an
aggressive form of Prostate Cancer. As his caregiver, Barbara has a lot to deal with.

“Myself, as a caregiver, sitting out in the backyard, is huge for me, because that may be the only hour in
the day that I get, to just stop. Either I’m working full time, or I’m - caregiving full time.”

Over the past year, many of Tom’s symptoms and side effects have gotten worse. He and Barbara realized
they needed help beyond what his medical care team could provide. So, they started Palliative Care.

“Take a deep breath.”

Palliative Care is specialized medical treatment for people with serious illness. It is focused on providing relief
from the pain, symptoms, and stress of a severe condition and its treatment and improving quality of life - for
the patient, and their family.

“If somebody is dealing with illness, it affects them - but it also affects the people around them.
Generally speaking, somebody is designated, as the primary caregiver to take on more responsibility in
terms of supporting the person who is ill, than others.”

“I got it.”

As Tom’s cancer has taken a greater toll on what he can and can’t do physically, Barbara has taken on more
and more responsibilities, like driving.

“I decided, and he decided, he just couldn’t handle driving “She’s right” much anymore. Maybe to, you
know, a 5-minute ride to the store and back; but the symptoms are so bad, that you never know when
one of them is gonna hit.”

Caregivers can have a number of duties, including managing family finances and handling household chores,
like cooking and cleaning. In addition, they many need to: make and keep track of medical appointments for
their loved one and accompany the person on those visits; pick up prescription medications and make sure
they’re taken as directed; watch for any changes in the person’s condition and report them to health care
providers; ensure the house is safe for their loved one, by installing grab bars in the bathroom, for example;
and in some cases, help with dressing and bathing.

“The caregiver is a very valuable member of the Palliative Care Team. The caregiver goes across all
doctors and all specialists, and therefore has very, very valuable insight, into - what is the history, what
makes the person tick, and what is the most important thing to the patient for whom they are caring.”

Ideally, a caregiver is someone who lives nearby. But that’s not always the case. The person most able to help
might live in a different city, state, or even country.

“A long-distance caregiver can do it by daily phone calls, by being involved with the care/treatment
team. They can have family meetings using technology; and they can call and check in; and go for
periodic visits.”
Palliative Care: The Role of the Caregiver

Whether you’re far away or nearby, being a caregiver can be difficult. Palliative Care can help caregivers: learn how to provide the specific care your loved one needs; manage the stress of caregiving; and access the support you need, like respite care, to give you a break as a caregiver.

“It is very important to continue to take care of your own needs, and make sure that you don’t neglect your health, your relationships, or your work life, because you’re taking care of someone who is ill.”

“Come here boy.” Where’s your lease.”

On their first day of Palliative Care, Barbara learned how dedicated the team is - not only to making things easier for Tom, but also to helping ease her burden.

“I received a call from the social worker. She said, ‘I’m here for you, as well. You can call me at any time with any problem, or issue, you might be having,’ Just the fact that I know someone’s there, when I get to my breaking point, makes all the difference.”