**This is Caring: Scott**

**Around three million people in the UK are working carers, which means many of us know how balancing work and caring can feel like a plate-spinning act. However, employers can make workplaces more carer-friendly, keeping more people in their job and helping us keep our plates in motion. Working carer, Scott Corley, shares how his employer supports his caring life.**



When Amber was born I saw myself as a father, but after her cystic fibrosis diagnosis, I froze in my steps at the hospital one day. A thought jumped into my head, ‘I’ll have to give up work.’ That thought petrified me and that was when I realised I was a carer as well as a father.

I’m still just as fearful that I might have to give up work as I was 10 years ago. Of course, there’s a financial fear, but also my job gives me purpose beyond being a husband and father and the thought of losing that is quite scary. You never switch off from caring, but there is a medicinal effect from work – it gives you something else to think about. I think a lot of carers need that.

Now Amber’s 10 years old and my wife, Louise, and I care for her together. We look after her health on a daily basis, which means giving medication, watching her diet, providing physiotherapy and making sure she takes regular exercise. The condition itself has bouts of poorer health, which sometimes means she has to go into hospital for more intensive treatment.

Cystic fibrosis affects all parts of the body, it thickens mucous and that has a devastating effect on the lungs and the stomach. Amber needs to take medication before she eats to have efficient digestion. Also, infections in her lungs can cause irreparable damage. The more care we can give her at home and avoid hospital stays, the more she can carry on with her day-to-day life.

**Everyday care**

We also have a two-year-old daughter, Rose, so my usual day starts early. We need to get our kids ready for school and nursery. Within that time we also need to give several medications to Amber, including the nebulizer (a breathing apparatus that administers drugs to the lungs via a mist).

I work as a service improvement partner for the Financial Ombudsman Service. My day at the office is busy, involving meetings and collaborating with people across the whole organisation to make our services the best they can be. My wife also works part-time for the same organisation.

Back at home after dinner, there’ll be more treatments for Amber, the nebulizer again and some physio. She spends at least 20 minutes a day on a nebulizer and we spend 20-30 minutes a day doing physio with her. We always do physio, but when she’s poorly we increase the level of it. We do patting on her chest or we encourage her to do any kind of physical activity to get the mucous out from her lungs.

Over the last 10 years we’ve had periods of Amber being really unwell and our first line of treatment is antibiotics. She has an implant called a portacath, it’s a tube that runs straight into the arteries towards her heart and that allows us to inject antibiotics directly into her blood stream to fight the infection. Someone needs to be at home with her to administer her medication.

**Helping employers help carers**



We have a balancing act between work and home. At work we try to help our managers understand our situation and give them as much warning as possible when we think Amber’s health is deteriorating. If I say to my manager, ‘Amber has a cough’ they need to understand that’s not just a normal cough and might be the start of something more serious, which might involve me being away from the office.

My employers are really supportive of us. We have a dedicated carers’ group in the office and I am now its co-chair. A while ago, Carers UK came in to talk to the group and I told them that I felt some anxiety whenever there was a change in manager. The journey typically goes that you build a relationship with a manager and educate them about your situation, which makes things easier. When you get a new manager you start to feel this anxiety rising. You start to think, ‘I hope this manager is as understanding as the last one.’ Carers UK put forward the idea of a carer passport which is an informal document asking a series of questions about your needs.

The carer group worked through the idea of a carer passport with our HR department and put together a document that’s now in place in the whole organisation. The passport itself doesn’t give any guarantees that the manager will be understanding, but it starts the conversation about what caring means to that individual. It also asks what kind of support would be right for the carer. I need opportunities to work from home and I need my manager to be receptive to different working patterns when Amber is really poorly. I also need time away from the office to accompany her to medical appointments, which can be quite lengthy. Flexibility and freedom to do what I need to do outside ofthe office is invaluable.

Recently, the carers’ group had a conversation with our HR department about how some carers use their holiday days or buy extra holiday days for caring responsibilities. Our employer recognised that wasn’t the best way of supporting carers and encouraged us to develop a carer policy, which we did in conjunction with our HR department and with the support of the Employers for Carers team at Carers UK. Our carer policy allows up to five days of paid leave for caring responsibilities, which can be taken in half days or full days. It’s up to the carer to decide how to use it. It can be used for emergency situations, to accompany someone to hospital, if adjustments are being made to the home or even if the carer has had a rough night it could allow them to have rest the following day. There are no conditions to accessing this leave and you don’t need to have a carer passport to get it. If what the person is describing sounds like a carer’s responsibility the right thing to do is to support that person.

**Caring conversations**

The visibility of carers in our organisation, through the policy, passport and sessions we run for sharing carers’ stories, has helped other colleagues better understand the role of carers. There’s a dialogue here about caring and we’re taking progressive steps to make the workplace better for carers. Many managers are desperate to do the right thing even if they have no direct experience of caring. Some of the strongest advocates in our organisation for the carer policy were some of the managers who didn’t have their own caring responsibilities. They just thought this was a common
sense idea.

Being transparent about my situation with my employers has worked for me, but I know not all employers are as receptive. I’d encourage employees in other organisations to get a carers’ group together. I’m very passionate about our group – it’s about listening, trying to find solutions, empathy and pragmatism.

The hardest thing about being a working carer is being pulled between so many priorities. There are things I want to achieve at work and there’s always that priority at home. That pull is what still makes me feel I might have to give up my job.

The support my organisation has given me as a carer makes me more committed to them. Speaking to family, friends and other carers, I know that not all employers are that sympathetic. I appreciate how lucky we are and it makes us feel that we are able to look after Amber as best as we can. There have been some dark moments with Amber and just knowing that I can take a paid day’s leave to be with her makes all the difference. It feels like a bit of good luck in a sea of bad luck.