

Meet Pat Dean: NSCR's Caregiver Support Men's Group Facilitator



Meet Pat Dean and learn why he started NSCR's first Caregiver Support group for men.

What has been your journey into caregiving?

My journey began in 2003 when my wife was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. She was 54 years old. I was 55. I was to learn that Parkinson's Disease affects everyone differently. In Elle's case, her neurologist prescribed drugs and she was able to work until she was 58. Her company provided disability pension at full pay until she was 65. I retired in 2007. We made three decisions:

- To abandon thoughts of a sailboat - a passion we shared for years prior to her illness.
- We'd take a long dreamt-about 3-month vacation to New Zealand.
- We'd sell our house in North Vancouver and move to Vernon where we had extended family.

We did all three. Unfortunately, Elle's condition began to worsen in Vernon. She developed Truncal Dystonia, which is

irreversible, caused her immense pain, forced her into a permanent stoop, and she began using a walker. I realized that if she was to receive the care she needed, a move back to North Vancouver was necessary. We left our beautiful walk-out rancher with a view in Vernon and moved into a two-bedroom "disability friendly" condo in North Vancouver. That is when my caregiving really began, and I started going to a Parkinson's caregiving group. We had an occupational therapist suggest additional movement aids and Elle stopped driving almost immediately. We found a neurological physiotherapist, a doctor at St Paul's that specialized in Dystonia pain, and began seeing her new neurologist, a mobility specialist. We also got a scooter.

I continued to care for Elle at home. However, her condition worsened, and in 2018 she went into an assisted living facility. It was ideal at first, but as her needs increased, she was transferred to residential care in 2020. She is receiving excellent care and I can visit her regularly as it's a 10-minute drive from our apartment.

What made you want to be a caregiver group facilitator?

I attended care groups in Vernon, Armstrong, and North Vancouver, most sponsored by the Parkinson's Society of BC. I also started attending a group sponsored by NSCR. It was my experience that the Parkinson's groups were excellent, but I was usually the sole male. Most of the people in the Parkinson's group were caring for spouses. My experience at NSCR was different. The group was attended by men and women who were caring for parents, children, siblings, and friends. I approached the previous facilitator last year and asked her if there was a men's group. The only one she could find was in Victoria; accessible by Zoom but a long ferry ride for in-person meetings. She suggested I start a group.

Tell us about your specific group.

After several meetings to discuss parameters, it was decided we would start in summer 2020. We did not limit it to any specific disability, but did decide the group would be solely for men caring for spouses, either at home or in care. We had two in-person meetings at NSCR, but then were limited to Zoom because of Covid. We are now back to in-person meetings as I feel they are more personal and NSCR has reopened their Community Room for these. At the moment we are meeting from 12-2pm on the first Thursday of every month. We currently have 6 members including myself but would certainly welcome more.

What do you feel are some benefits to attending a caregiving group?

The benefits are almost endless. In addition to being able to express your thoughts and feelings in private to others who are in a similar caregiving position, each member has learned an incredible amount about their own individual journeys. Almost any question asked can be answered by other members or with NSCR's resources. The current NSCR facilitator, Vic, is a social worker and huge advocate/resource asset for us, and we can call on professionals to address our group when the need arises.

How do you take care of yourself?

One of the main ways is by giving back. When you are caring for a spouse, it has been said that "you are neither married nor single." You are a caregiver, and you must constantly remind yourself that if you don't look after your physical and mental health, you cannot adequately care for your spouse. Meditation, exercise, eating well, and getting enough sleep all help. Maintaining a positive attitude is most necessary but often hard to do. I have found the compassion I've received from my caregiving groups helped immensely with this and is food for the soul.

NSCR's Caregiver Support Program and Contact Information

Our program offers support to caregivers so you can maintain your own resilience, health and well-being.

Stepping into a caregiving role is often a life-altering experience. Caregiving takes courage, patience, and endurance. It can be a challenging and lonely role.

Fortunately, you are not alone. North Shore Community Resources' Caregiver Support Program is here to help you gain knowledge, strength, and inspiration and provides opportunities to connect with other caregivers. Our Caregiver Support Program hosts support groups and workshops, one-on-one consultations in person, by telephone and online as well as referrals to health care and community services. We offer stress management strategies and relaxation techniques, informative blog posts, a resource library, and a bi-monthly newsletter.

For more information and details, contact:

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