Managing and providing long-distance caregiving can be as compassionate as it is challenging—a delicate balancing act of trying to respect the wants of your loved ones and meeting the reality of their needs, which oftentimes are in conflict. That said, there’re a number of lessons I learned from my experience about what’s helpful to have in place in order to do long-distance caregiving. They include the following:

- Have conversations and identify with your loved ones and their doctors, what their needs and concerns are, and what your concerns are about their situation.

- Make regular trips to look around the house: How’re your loved ones doing? Is the house clean? Is the refrigerator well-stocked?

- Plan extended stays in order to do research on caregivers and conduct face-to-face interviews.

- When the caregiver is in place, provide that person with a contact list of doctors, social workers, family, neighbors and helpful agencies; and explicit written instructions about the home protocol and hygienic and medication regimen of your loved ones.

- Secure important documents and, if possible, make copies to take to your home.

- Stay on top of finances, whether you pay the bills or someone else does so.

- Set up a support network that includes family and neighbors who check-in periodically and run errands, such as food shopping and taking loved ones to appointments. Be sure to give someone who lives nearby a set of house keys.
Keep helpful phone numbers easily accessible, including the cell phone of the caregiver. Have regular check-in calls with not only your loved ones, but also the caregiver and the doctors. Be sure to keep extensive and dated notes of these conversations, ask questions, push back, if necessary and unapologetically; and be pro-active about the care of your loved ones.

As you may know, hospices provide a range of services that include palliative, not curative care, through the final stage of living. Their aim is to provide comfort to your loved ones in the time they have.

What I learned during this process are:

- Medicare, Medicaid, and many private insurers have a hospice benefit that covers hospice care.
- Members of the hospice staff make regular visits to assess patients and provide additional care or other services, as needed.
- When your loved one makes the transition from life, hospice can take care of all the immediate next steps, which include:
  - Making the pronouncement of death;
  - Contacting the local office of the city’s Medical Examiner, which issues the Certificate of Death;
  - Calling the funeral home to arrange for them to come to your home to receive your loved one in preparation for the funeral and interment; and
  - Disposing the content of the medical comfort kit they may have issued to your loved one.
- Hospices also provide care and counseling to surviving families and friends.
- Finally, similar to your communication with the caregiver and doctors, it’s important to maintain regular contact with the hospice staff, keep notes with dates of your conversations, ask questions, push back unapologetically, and above all, be pro-active.