



# Doctor Appointments and Transportation Obstacles

By Ilana Jacqueline

**IN SOUTH FLORIDA**, where I live, if you don't have a car, you're not going anywhere. There is virtually no public transportation and, only recently, has Uber started to become more available. Because of the heat, very few people walk or ride their bikes for more than a block. There are very few buses with few stops, no subways and no convenient train stations.

So, when you hear that people in Florida drive crazy, you can rest assured this is an accurate observation. Whether you're too sick or too old to drive, you don't have much choice if you need to get to a doctor and can't find a reliable ride.

This has long been a nightmare for me. With all of my health problems, I prefer not to drive. While I might feel fine when I leave, I can't predict how exhausted I'll be when I need to go home. And, with chronic fatigue, I need to limit the length of time I allow myself to drive to avoid losing concentration. I also won't drive on highways anymore.

Because of this, I have to limit the range of doctors I see. If I need to see a specialist who is in the next town, I have to find a reliable mode of transportation. Enter my mom. Moms are very reliable methods of transportation to and from doctor offices. This is because they love you, want you to be well and know how important it is that you get to your appointments safely.

While moms have their own lives and can also become exhausted, they will rarely hesitate to put these things before your medical needs — which is wonderful and certainly something you can appreciate during an emergency or a short period of illness.

However, for chronic illness patients, the mom solution lacks longevity. And, as with any family member or close friend who constantly offers support, you must take their support sporadically, and ideally find a more independent solution.

I feel very strongly about the saying: "It takes a village." Those of us with chronic illness can't rely on a single person to assist us. Support has to be executed by a team — friends, family and neighbors — as well as with money, technology and community.

vary, they are most often drastically lower in price than a taxi, and certainly less expensive than an ambulance ride. Uber has implemented an excellent handicap-friendly branch of services, including drivers who allow service animals, wheelchair-accessible vans and even Uber-ASSIST, a program that provides vehicles operated by drivers who have obtained independent training from third-party organizations to assist riders into their cars.

Still, there are days when things don't work out the way you plan. When I'm

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In 2016, Blue Cross Blue Shield implemented a new initiative. To encourage a cost-effective, preventive plan for good health, the company decided to make sure every patient could get to their scheduled doctor appointment. Using services like Lyft and Uber, it picked up the tab for patients as often as needed. As a result, costs declined, hospital readmission rates fell and healthcare providers reported fewer cancelled appointments. Hopefully, more insurance companies will see the benefits of this and follow suit.

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in a real bind, I've often asked my doctors if I can do my appointment over the phone or through Skype. Many have said no. But, a few have been fine with getting an update on my disease management in cases where an exam wasn't entirely necessary. It never hurts to ask! ■



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