

Organization aids caregivers for people with Alzheimer's, dementia

Kate Miller Of the Suburban Journals - West County Journal - Wednesday, Jan. 04 2006

A new organization is coming to the aid of people who are caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's disease and dementia-related illnesses.

The organization, Memory Care Home Solutions, offers classes on how to care for loved ones with these illnesses, a referral service and in-home consultations.

Because the organization is funded primarily by grants and donations, client fees are determined on a sliding scale.

Lisa P. Baron started Memory Care Home Solutions after taking care of her mother-in-law. With that experience, she saw a need for resources that could help caregivers better care for themselves and, in turn, better care for their loved ones.

"The idea is people learn coping strategies in a hands-on way," Baron said. "They learn easy things that can make a difference to everyone."

The educational aspects include how to make a home safer; how to communicate more constructively; and how to manage typical behaviors of those with such illnesses, such as sleeplessness, wandering, agitation, anger and delusions.

Memory Care Home Solutions program coordinator Stefanie Osiek visits clients' homes to suggest how to make the home safer and run more smoothly. She also leads the caregiver training courses.

Osiek said the need for caregiver services is growing, because more people are being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

She said an estimated 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease, and that number is increasing because people are living longer. Increasing age is the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. Statistics show that one in 10 people older than 65 is affected, and nearly half of people older than 85 are affected.

The majority of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease are being cared for at home by loved ones. By 2010, the number of care-giving households could reach 45 million.

Judy Becker of Ladue is the primary caregiver for her husband, Andy. Andy was diagnosed with Alzheimer's more than a year ago. At this point, Judy said, Andy is able to take care of himself. But issues come up, such as losing track of time, and he cannot do everything he used to.

"The whole thing is: 'How are you doing today? How can I help -- or should I stay out your way?'" Judy said. "There can be really good days, and there can be not-so-good days."

On her end, "You have to remember everything that has to be done, from balancing the checkbook to taking out the garbage," she said. On top of that, "He's always on my mind. I'm always concerned about how he's doing."

When Judy consulted Memory Care Home Solutions, she learned about the disease, its stages and how to deal with issues that might come up, she said.

"It's nice to know there's somebody there who is geared up to help you, the caregiver. It's a nice feeling," she said.

Millard Goffstein of University City is the primary caregiver for his wife, Sybil. He, too, has consulted Memory Care Home Solutions.

"It was a good experience," he said. "They told what's available, what to expect. I learned primarily how to cope with situations, how to not get completely frustrated with what was going on."

Memory Care Home Solutions offers training classes at a few locations in west St. Louis County. They include Covenant House, 10 Millstone Campus Drive near Creve Coeur, and the Crown Center, 8350 Delcrest Drive in University City.

Training venues are being developed at Bethesda Dilworth, 9645 Big Bend Blvd. in Kirkwood, and other locations.

For more information, call (314) 353-1011 or visit www.memorycarehs.org.