

Family support aids in aging gracefully

Your aged father is behaving drastically with money. He is making bizarre purchases and isn't paying his household bills. How would you handle this situation?

The doctor has prescribed a very rigid diet essential to your aged mother's health. She refuses to eat it. What do you do?

You are unable to care for your mother. How would you get her to agree to a nursing home?

"We are all aging," but we are each unique and with aging, have different problems, OSU Extension gerontology specialist Vicki Schmall pointed out at a February 7 presentation at Kollen Hall in Madras. In dealing with aged parents there arise individual problems which demand solutions with respect for the aged parent's feelings.

In 1900, one out of every 25 persons were over the age of 65. In 1970, it was one out of 10. In 1980, one out of nine persons were over the age of 65. It is predicted by the 21st century, one out of every five adults will be over 65.

Two million Americans are over the age of 85. By the 21st century this group will reach six million.

These figures imply, according to Schmall, that more people are living a healthier life and there will be an increase in four to five generation families in the future.

Age is no basis for



The subject of problems with aging is difficult to speak about. To encourage expression OSU Gerontology Specialist Vicki Schmall invited the audience to join in a game called Families and aging, dilemmas and decisions. Situations to be dealt with in the game included such categories as death, communication, money and family.

categorization she feels. In some cases an elderly mother may be caring for an aging child because she is more mentally fit. There is much diversity in these relationships as to who provides the mental and emotional support.

Frailty doesn't mean a person is mentally incompetent. A person who has the mental ability to do so should be allowed to make his own decisions. The family should focus on the person's strengths rather than his limitations.

Family meetings provide a

way to air out feelings in a positive way. Good communication is necessary in making decisions involving an aged family member. It must be understood, too, that not each family member can provide the same degree of support for an aged parent. It is necessary to be honest by knowing each family member's limits.

Acceptance of a parent with his own rights, limitations and history is essential. Communication with the parent is also important. Involving the parent as a family member, not

trying to hide things for his or her sake, gives the parent a sense of belonging, says Schmall. Acknowledge the parent's feelings, realizing he is feeling a loss. If it is necessary he should leave his home he will especially grieve along with feeling grief for the loss of his own abilities as he ages.

Other rules to follow in dealing with aging parents, according to Schmall, include: not dictating to a parent, avoiding defensiveness when speaking with them, and not making promises which

sometimes can't be kept.

Family members, too, are sensitive when a parent begins to age and lose some of his abilities. It is difficult to watch a loved one deteriorate sometimes very quickly should disease be present. There are fears associated with each one's own future, visualizing himself as an aged person like the parent.

When caregiving, family members must consider their own needs, remaining healthy and strong and avoiding stress as much as possible.

The strain of aging is sometimes reduced in discussion of events that may happen such as funeral arrangements, what to do with the house or any other emergencies that may emerge. The "what-ifs" should be discussed along with options available. This would allow better adjustments and some insurance against unsatisfactory, later-regretted decisions.

Relationships between family members don't change with aging. Where there was once a loving, caring relationship there will be the same as years progress. Aging can be a rewarding experience for all family members with good, strong communication and respect for one another.

Schmall will be speaking on aging and Alzheimer's disease in Warm Springs on March 18. Information may be obtained through the Warm Springs Extension office, 553-1161, Ext. 238 and 239.

Memory loss can result from disease

Memory loss or senility is not a common part of aging. It occurs only to a very small percentage (5% to 6%) of older people, primarily those over 50. It is the result of a disease which has an unknown cause, called senile dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

Medically, senile dementia is a "degenerative process, with a large loss of cells from the cerebral cortex and other brain areas." Memory loss is the most prominent early symptom.

The disease exhibits symptoms in the 50th to 60th years of life progressing steadily from forgetfulness to total disability. The cause of the illness is not known and at present there is no way to stop or cure it.

Alzheimer's disease begins with a gradual loss of memory, particularly recent or short-term memory. Forgetting to turn off the stove or failure to recall what medicines were taken are common examples of the memory loss exhibited by people with Alzheimer's disease.

Personality changes are also evident with onset of the disease. Some people will withdraw from social interaction. With progression of the disease problems in abstract thinking and intellectual functioning will occur. There may be trouble with understanding what is being read or organization of the day's work. Agitation, irritability and lack of concern with appearance are

also symptoms of the disease.

The specific problems associated with the disease vary with the individual. One person may progress in severity at a faster rate than another. The capacity of the person with Alzheimer's disease to cope with his disease varies, depending on lifelong personality traits and the stress caused by the immediate environment.

Accurate diagnosis of the disease must be made. Memory loss may be due to other medical problems, including injuries to the head, infection, nutritional deficiencies, circulatory or neurological problems.

Treatment for this disease is aimed at adjustment and psychological attention to the patient and must also include assistance to the family as a whole.

Conditions to improve the environment are taken into consideration and making the patient comfortable in his surroundings important. There is no available treatment to cure the disease, reverse it or prevent its progression so treatment is basically one of helping the afflicted individual through the progression of the disorder to maintain as much comfort and dignity as possible.

Emotional support from the family and friends is of particular importance for both the afflicted and those caring for the individual. As the

disease progresses the family often experiences stress and pain at seeing their loved one go through these changes. Support from one another is important.

The responsibility of the family physician is to offer support and suggest support groups for the family. He must explain to the family that

"they're not the first to deal with this," explains Warm Springs IHS physician Paul Balmer. The physician can tell the family what to expect and what not to expect.

"The medical profession is scrambling to recoup from the formerly blaze attitude" concerning this disease, Balmer adds. With the discovery that

senility is a disease and not a fact of old age, the medical profession is in search of a cause and a cure.

Memory loss may be a symptom of Alzheimer's disease or it may be a symptom of another medical problem. A physical examination by a family physician is in order in any case of memory loss.

Students to participate in Health Fair

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ways in which you can help yourself to better health by your own efforts and better use of available community resources.

Warm Springs Elementary students will make personal contributions and share in the responsibility for organization and implementation of the Health Fair along with experienced members of the community. They will select topics from the health curricula and present them at the fair. This will provide them with a more positive experience with the subject matter in health classes and hopefully infuse the knowledge and experiences more effectively into their lives.

The following health screening tests will be available at the Health Fair: Height and weight, lung function, blood pressure, vision, hearing and working heart rate.

The festival will be open to the public from 9:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. Students in Warm Springs Elementary will have the opportunity to attend

during the following hours: 2nd-9:00-10:00 a.m., 1st-10:00-11:00 a.m., 5th-11:00-12:00 p.m. 3rd-12:30-1:30 p.m., 4th-1:30-2:30 p.m., and 6th-2:30-3:15 p.m.

At three different times during the day, students will present a fifteen minute physical education activity consisting of dancing, tumbling and jump rope routines. These

activities will take place at 11:00, 1:30 and 7:00 p.m.

There will be a special session for parents from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. discussing "The Growth and Development Stages of Puberty" Linda Allen, Jefferson County health nurse, Arlene Boleau, and Dr. Paul Balmer will be making the presentation.

"Conflict in communication slated as topic

"Conflict in communication regarding drugs and alcohol with children" is the topic of a presentation February 21 at Madras Jr. High. The speaker will be Mr. Paul "Tex" Yearout from the Youth Enterprise Agency in Yakima, Washington.

Yearout has spoken to students in 5000 schools, over two million children in 21

years, in an effort to help parents and teenagers communicate. He also conducts workshops and seminars in communication skills.

Yearout will be speaking to students at Madras Jr. High at 2:30 p.m. and parents at 7:00 p.m. Parents are invited to attend either session.