



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month

Legacy Community Health geriatric specialist offers tips for caregivers of dementia patients

HOUSTON – (June 5, 2023) – As the population ages, more people will be faced with caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or another type of dementia. The road for caregivers is challenging at best and difficult to navigate without the proper guidance.

Described as a non-specific syndrome that impacts memory, language, complex motor skills, and other intellectual abilities, dementia interferes with daily life and activities. There are several forms of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common, accounting for 50 to 80 percent of all cases.

According to a recent report published by the Seniorly Resource Center, Texas has one of the highest caregiver burden scores, indicating that the state lags in supporting the loved ones of those with dementia.

During Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month in June, Legacy Community Health wants to empower caregivers of dementia patients by providing them with tips to avoid burnout and other helpful advice.

"The most important thing to remember when caring for a loved one with dementia is that you are not alone. At times, it can feel isolating, but there is help and support available, including caregiver support groups, adult programs for persons with dementia, and respite care," said Dr. Alexandra Sibley, a geriatric psychiatrist at Legacy Community Health.

Below are additional recommendations from Dr. Sibley on how best to care for someone with dementia.

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- Be mindful of how you respond to a patient who appears confused. For example, if the person is confused about the day's schedule, it may be best to offer clarification. However, it is also essential to determine whether clarification and/or correction usually helps the person or causes distress. It is probably best to avoid direct modification if it worsens the situation. For example, a typical scenario occurs when people with dementia have active psychotic symptoms and hear voices and see things that are not really there. This can frustrate people with dementia because the hallucinations seem real to them. "In this situation, I encourage sympathizing with the patient's feelings rather than providing direct confrontation," said Dr. Sibley.

- When caring for someone with dementia, it's important to remember that communication challenges are inevitable. Keeping communication simple and providing instructions/information one step at a time can help keep it more manageable. Avoid saying, "I just told you that; don't you remember?" or similar statements. Remember that the person with dementia is doing the best they can and provide frequent repetition of instruction without judgment.
- Dementia can lead to personality changes, agitation, aggression, and other distressing behaviors. Know that these behaviors are due to the nature of the illness and not due to the person with dementia willfully or voluntarily performing the behaviors.
- Know that just because someone has dementia, this doesn't mean that they cannot continue to have a meaningful life. Although they may suffer from anxiety and depression, treatment is available.
- As a caregiver, you need to take care of yourself. In addition to eating right, exercising, and getting plenty of rest, it's essential to nourish your own emotional well-being and stay involved in activities that give you meaning and purpose outside of your caregiving role. Plugging into support groups for caregivers or participating in your counseling/therapy are good ways to prevent and manage burnout.

"When you're on an airplane, you are always told to put on your oxygen mask before helping others put on their own mask; the same is true for caring for a loved one with dementia," said Dr. Sibley. "Caregiving for a person with dementia can be a meaningful experience, but at the same time, it can also be extremely challenging."

Legacy offers a wide range of health care services for senior citizens and their caregivers. For more information, visit <https://www.legacycommunityhealth.org/services/geriatrics/>.

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About Legacy Community Health, Inc.:

Legacy Community Health Services "(Legacy") is a full-service network of over 50 community health centers offering primary and specialty care, and pharmacy services in the Texas Gulf Coast region. Legacy has been innovating how comprehensive, quality health care services are provided to underserved communities for over 40 years. As the largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Texas, our services and programs are open to all, regardless of the ability to pay, without judgment or exception. Legacy has been a United Way affiliated agency since 1990. To learn more, visit www.legacycommunityhealth.org.