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HEALTH

FSU training videos offer tips on caring for dementia patients

Nicolette Castagna Special to the Tallahassee Democrat

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In Florida there are about 580,000 individuals living with dementia and the majority are living in homes with family or friends. Remarkably, over 550,000 individuals in our state provide informal or unpaid care to their loved ones afflicted with dementia. Caregiving can be especially challenging when dealing with dementia. Dementia, in its most common form of Alzheimer's disease, can cause individuals to experience the world differently.

Changes in the brain affect memory, communication abilities, and judgement. Persons with dementia may not understand what they are hearing or seeing. These symptoms can sometimes cause stressful situations, and at times, a crisis that leads to a 911 call. People may wander away from home. They may become upset to the point that others around them feel unsafe.

It can be hard to know how to effectively respond in these situations. And to an outside person, such as a police officer, it is not always obvious that someone is living with dementia. We need to be aware that our interactions with persons with dementia can have a huge impact on outcomes, especially in a stressful situation.

In honor of November as National Family Caregivers month, Florida State University is highlighting an important resource in our community to help those caring for or interacting with persons with dementia. The Florida State University College of Medicine Department of Geriatrics has a federal training grant to enhance various populations' ability to provide care for older adults. This includes supporting activities to promote more dementia-friendly communities.

FSU, in partnership with the Tallahassee Police Department and Leon County Emergency Management Services, came together to create training videos that show how to better respond in emergency situations involving persons with dementia. Tallahassee Police

Department prioritized these videos as an important training element for their agency. Their entire force, of over 350 officers, has completed the training this year.

The training videos show a family member in two difficult situations involving a loved one living with dementia and how they and police and paramedics respond effectively. The approach offers easy to remember tips for those caring for someone with dementia and first responders so they can learn how to work together.

It is important that both groups – family caregivers and first responders - can each safely do their jobs without negatively impacting the person with dementia. This begins with understanding the important steps that can be taken to decrease a stressful situation and help people feel safe.

Almost everyone has someone in their family or knows someone who is affected by this disease. The more educated we are the better we can communicate with someone living with dementia and know how to effectively help during difficult times. See the videos at reach.med.fsu.edu or find them at the FSU Resources and Education for Aging Community and Health (REACH) YouTube channel.

The delivery behind this program is funded through the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. The FSU College of Medicine is one of 48 organizations in 35 states to receive the competitive grant supporting workforce and community training initiatives.

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