

local news

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TALKING WITH ...

Rob Glueckauf

Glueckauf is directing a project that helps African American caregivers.



By **CIARA VARONE**
Daily Sun Staff Writer

For 23 years, Dr. Rob Glueckauf has been inspired by his mother — a caregiver for her mother-in-law, mother and sister with dementia — to research ways to help caregivers.

In the first part of the African-American Alzheimer's Caregiver Training and Support (ACTS) project, Glueckauf and his team of researchers found that support delivered to African-American caregivers by mental health professionals, whether in person or over the phone, led to declines in emotional distress and depressive symptoms and improvements in the health status of caregivers.

The team is seeking participants for a followup project, ACTS 2, which is a free, faith-based support system for African-American caregivers delivered over the phone. The research team will soon accept the 2017 Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiving Legacy Award for Diverse/Multicultural Communities for its work on the project. The Daily Sun spoke with Glueckauf, a professor in the department of behavioral sciences and social medicine at the Florida State University College of Medicine and ACTS 2 project director, about the

program and how caregivers can take part.

How does ACT 2 work?

We are providing telephone-based skills building and support... In ACTS1, caregivers spoke frequently about the attitude of gratitude, thanking the Lord for the rewards of caregiving, for providing them the strength to persevere in the face of challenges. So in ACTS 2, we decided to make our skills building and support program strongly grounded in the faith tradition of many African-American family caregivers. Instead of involving mental health professionals, we decided that it would be best to train faith community workers, those who were nominated by their pastors and elders ... to deliver the skills building and support program with the idea that, ultimately, ACTS 2 would be integrated within the faith community, essentially run by the community, and we would serve as consultants.

What does the program entail?

The ACTS 2 faith-based skills building support program consists of 12 telephone-based sessions. The first seven sessions are conducted in groups of three caregivers and one facilitator over a teleconferencing system. We call

those first seven sessions skills building sessions focusing on skills such as relaxation combined with prayer, effective thinking combined with sacred text or scriptures, managing difficult behaviors associated with dementia. Then we have five one-on-one sessions between each caregiver and the facilitator focusing on their self-identified concerns. Then the 12th session is a wrap-up session when the caregivers talk about their successes and challenges in obtaining individual goals and resolving the concerns they identified and preparing for the future. What also makes the ACTS 2 project unique is that we have follow-ups. The facilitators maintain contact with the caregivers after the program based on preference and need with no limitations on the time of follow-up.

Why does the project focus on African-American dementia caregivers?

Number one, African Americans are two times more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and related dementias than other population groups ... Although the absolute number of persons with dementia is higher in the non-Hispanic white population, a greater proportion of African-Americans will develop dementia than the majority population. Number two, African-American caregivers, although very dedicated and very much family focused, have

challenges that other groups may not face. They provide a significantly larger proportion of their monthly family income in serving their loved ones with dementia. They also tend to be more involved in the most challenging caregiving activities, such as bathing and hygiene, than other groups. The challenge is that even though African-American caregivers are highly challenged, access to culturally sensitive services is limited ... Most are not geared to the family and faith values of African-Americans, especially older African Americans residing in the Southeast region of the country.

How can people get involved in the project?

If African-American family caregivers of older adults with dementia are interested in getting more information about the ACTS 2 project or participating in the program, they can either call the toll-free number, 1-866-778-2724, or contact our project coordinator, Tomeka Norton-Brown at 850-274-4945 or tnnorton@fsu.edu. They can also sign up on the web at acts2project.org. This is completely free, and those who participate in the program can receive up to \$90 as a token of our appreciation for participating in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

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