

Caregivers need own support network

• Senior Center Family Caregiver Program offers many resources

By Frances K. Foster

Staff reporter

Caregivers responsible for providing at least a portion of the physical or cognitive needs of a family member also find themselves “re-forming a relationship” that may have developed for more than 50 years, explained Stella Montano, director of the Family Caregiver Program at the Sheridan Senior Center, on Tuesday.

Oftentimes, family members experience “role reversal,” such as when an adult daughter begins taking care of her mother’s physical needs after the mother suffers a stroke that leaves her paralyzed, Montano said.

Couples who’ve been married for many decades and are long-accustomed to a routine and the roles each fills in the relationship may develop high levels of stress and frustration when one of them becomes dependent on the other in a way they haven’t experienced before, e.g., caring for a mate with Alzheimer’s disease who no longer remembers to eat.

In these situations, a spouse will actually “grieve for the loved one because he is losing a part of the person each day” as the disease progresses, Montano said.

Caregivers have many resources for all types of caregiving needs available at the Senior Center for fulfilling not only the needs of others, but also their own, Montano said.

Sometimes family caregivers have time to adjust to their new roles when a family member suffers from a disease such as Parkinson’s; but at other times, they may find themselves almost overnight — after a stroke, for example — in a position where they have little knowledge about and no support in caring for someone.

The Daybreak program offers personnel in a separate section of the Senior Center building, where seniors requiring physical or cognitive help can participate in activities and, therefore, provide a break for caregivers during the day.

Help is also available in the home with physical needs such as getting a parent out of a bathtub or with assisting devices such as a lift, she said.

“Accepting help is often difficult” for family caregivers, Montano said. They feel guilty about accepting help and worry that they haven’t done enough for their



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Bill and Mary Brown of Sheridan share a laugh as they fill out a crossword puzzle at the Sheridan Senior Center on Tuesday. Mrs. Brown, who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease, depends on her husband as her main caregiver.

loved one, she said.

Sometimes “caregiver burnout” causes direr consequences (e.g., heart attack) for the caregiver than for the person being cared for, she said.

Two caregiver support groups meet at the Senior Center each week, when participants can share tips with one another and “open up doors” for accepting help when offered.

Free massages are available at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. each Monday at the center for caregivers and at Westview Health Care Center every other week.

In addition to services offered by the Senior Center’s Family Caregiver Program, the center is hosting a Family Caregiver Conference on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning at Best Western Sheridan Center, she said.

Topics for the presentations at the center include Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia, dealing with stress, medications, adaptive equipment, home care and hospice,

end-of-life issues, communication, and Medicaid and Medicare.

Guest speaker is Jo Huey, a certified Alzheimer educator and author of two books on caring for Alzheimer’s patients. Other speakers include Dr. Thomas Niethammer of Sheridan, who will discuss end-of-life decisions.

Professional caregivers will pay a \$25 fee for the two-day conference, which includes two meals. There is no charge for family caregivers, Montano said.

Although attendees can register at the door the day of the conference, those who want a meal should RSVP by calling 672-2240.

People are welcome to attend only one presentation if they are interested, Montano said. Copies of the schedule are available at the center or online at www.sheridansenior-center.org, and more information is available by calling Montano at the above number.



Stella Montano

Senior Center Caregiver Services