

Contact: Allison Moore
Tel: 941-961-3708
Email: moore.pr@gmail.com

CARING FOR AN AGING MOTHER?

ADVICE FROM MATRIX HOME CARE PROFESSIONALS

WEST PALM BEACH – Pernille Ostberg cherishes memories of growing up with her mother in Michigan, and providing care later in life when her mom was struggling with Parkinson’s disease. “Through the difficult times, we continued to celebrate Mother’s Day together over a special meal, sharing memories of our lives,” said Ostberg, MBA, RPh, who is president and CEO, Matrix Home Care, a statewide service provider (www.matrixhomecare.com).

“Although my mother is gone now, I will always cherish her valiant spirit and the many years we enjoyed together.”

Like many Floridians, Ostberg knows that caring for an aging or disabled mother can be a difficult challenge for family members – one that continues long after a Mother’s Day celebration. “All too often, these unsung heroes don’t receive the recognition or support they deserve,” she says.

Nationally, more than 40 million Americans are caring for older relatives, according to the American Geriatrics Society. While some seniors may need relatively little assistance – such as transportation to the doctor or supermarket – others need daily help with cooking, bathing, dressing, taking medications and managing money. When a mother has Alzheimer’s disease or another form of dementia, round-the-clock care is usually necessary. And many South Florida caregivers are caught in a bind, raising children of their own while watching over an aging parent.

“Caregiver burnout is quite common nowadays,” said Alexander Fiuza, PhD, director of client services for Matrix. “It is very normal to feel anger, depression, bewilderment and loneliness. That’s why it’s vital for caregivers to take care of themselves, as well.”

Here are 10 suggestions for avoiding burnout from Fiuza, a psychologist who has worked with caregivers, families and patients for more than 20 years.

1. Take care of yourself. Get enough exercise, sleep and nourishing food. “Caregivers must meet their own personal needs, in order to help a family member,” said Fiuza.

2. Join a support group. Most South Florida community hospitals, churches, synagogues and health-related associations offer support groups free of charge. One example is the Alzheimer's Association of Dade County, which has groups that help caregivers deal with different phases of the disease. “Joining a caregiver support group in your area will give you a chance to share your thoughts, feelings and information with others in similar circumstances, making care giving less stressful,” Fiuza said. “

3. Write things down. If you're not comfortable sharing feelings with a group, buy a journal and write down your activities and emotions. Another option is going to a website where caregivers can share their stories and feelings.

4. Educate yourself. Understanding a relative's condition can help a caregiver plan day-to-day activities, as well as prepare for the changes that lie ahead. After all, knowledge is power.

5. Get support from friends and other family members. "You could ask your brother to take your parent to the store once a week," said Fiuza, "or perhaps a neighbor or friend could cook an extra meal or two on the weekend, relieving you of that task."

6. Change the home environment. Installing grab bars in the bathroom or bedroom can help a senior who is worried about losing her balance. Fiuza said, "These types of simple modifications to the home can make it possible for your relative to be more independent, reducing demands on the caregiver."

7. Take advantage of adult day care. South Florida has a number of programs for seniors, who can take part in social and recreational activities and eat healthy meals under the supervision of professionals. "For caregivers, adult day care can free up hours of time during the day," Fiuza said.

8. Engage respite care. Ask a friend, relative or volunteer from a faith community to watch your relative for a few hours. Other respite options for caregivers include hiring a companion or a home health aide for a few hours, a day or a weekend.

9. Get professional counseling. When feelings of depression or anger become overwhelming, a trained counselor can provide support and help you keep a healthy perspective on life.

10. Do something nice for yourself each day. Fiuza recommends taking at least a short break every day to something you enjoy. "Simple things like exercise, gardening, reading, watching TV or taking a walk around the block can do wonders to raise your spirits," he said. "Always remember that caring for yourself is the key to being a good caregiver for others."

About Matrix

Headquartered in West Palm Beach and operating throughout Florida, Matrix provides a complete array of services, home health care, and disability management so injured employees can quickly return to work. Matrix also provides independent senior care, specialty nurses' services, including wound care, infusion therapy, rehabilitation services (therapists) and care management services. Certified as a woman minority owned business, Matrix serves Southwest and Southeast Florida from locations in Tampa, Bradenton, Venice, Boca Raton, Pompano Beach Coral Gables, West Palm Beach and Jupiter.

For more information: www.matrixhomecare.com.

###