Use of Caregiver Mastery in Optimizing Treatment Planning for Dementia Caregivers and Care Recipients

Type of Project: Exploratory Clinical Research

Methods: Neuropsychology and Caregiving Survey

Status: Seeking $50,000 in funding

Study Period: Undetermined; one year study

University of Utah Collaborative Units: Department of Educational Psychology

Investigators: James A. Levy, Ph.D. (Principal Investigator); Robert D. Hill, Ph.D.

Project Summary:
This is a feasibility pilot study to examine caregiver mastery among spouses providing care for Alzheimer’s patients. A major public health issue facing the “baby boom” generation in the 21st Century will be the social and psychological consequences of providing care to loved ones with dementia. New concepts are needed from which to build interventions that can provide caregivers with the skills and resources needed to provide the greatest positive effect on caregiver emotional wellbeing. This project will develop a comprehensive, systematic, and theory-driven understanding of caregiving from a skills-based framework of caregiver competence. This research uses the relatively new concept of caregiver mastery describing a blend of coping resources and character traits such as optimism and flexibility. We will examine caregiving based upon the ability to harness one’s social support network, and utilize resources that exist in one’s community to offset the burdens of care.

We will examine 6 factors of caregiving based upon this model: (1.) Control: including the magnitude of perceived control over the caregiving. (2.) Competence: the caregiver’s perceived ability to complete specific caregiving tasks. (3.) Flexibility: one’s ability to be flexible in using different strategies and approaches to caregiving and philosophical point of view, including an orientation to religiosity and overall spirituality. (4.) Positive Aspects of Caregiving: such as deriving a sense of purpose in providing care to a loved one. (5.) Self-Care: the ability to attend to personal physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health. (6.) Resource Utilization: ability to obtain information about existing resources and how to access them, and dealing with barriers that may limit utilization, such as cost.

Potential Benefits:
This study will obtain baseline data for interventions planned to enhance caregiver health and success. It will provide a new model that emphasizes caregiving success rather than burden and focus on positive goals during caregiving.