The Tell Tale Signs of Caregiver Stress
Objectives

This session will help participants understand:

• What is caregiver stress
• What are the signs of caregiver stress
• How to manage caregiver stress
What is stress?

- Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand either internal or external.
- Caused by both good and bad experiences.
- Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by our response to pressure.
What causes caregivers stress?

Some sources of caregivers stress:

• Balancing work and caregiving
• Fear of the future
• Lack of knowledge about disease
• Role confusion
• Financial worries
• Family problems
The physical side of stress-your mind and body's reaction

The stress response is a natural chemical reaction that’s intended to help us adequately react to extreme situations.

• When you are faced with a demanding situation, chemicals are released by your brain to your body to help your body get ready for action.

• Your brain goes on high alert and your immune system temporarily “shuts down” so that your body can give top priority to concentrating on the stress demand.

• It’s not healthy to maintain this “high alert” level on a constant basis-wears down the body systems and end up damaging your physical and emotional health.
Warning signs of caregiver stress

- **Anger** towards the care-receiver, family members or others
- **Anxiety** about facing another day, worrying about what the future holds
- **Denial** about the disease or its effect on the person affected
- **Depression** (feelings of hopelessness much of the time)
- **Emotional reactions** at minor upsets (irritability, crying, yelling)
- **Exhaustion** (barely having the energy to complete daily tasks)
Warning signs of caregivers stress (cont.)

• **Health problems** like weight gain or loss, getting sick more often (cold, flu), chronic health problems (backaches, headaches, high blood pressure)

• **Lack of concentration** (Trouble focusing and difficulty completing tasks)

• **Social withdrawal** (lack of motivation to stay in touch with friends or to participate in activities that caregiver once enjoyed)
The risks of becoming stressed out

Some caregiver stress risks:

• You burn out
• Your health suffers
• The quality of care you can provide deteriorates
• Increased mortality rate
Who is vulnerable to stress?

The degree of stress in our lives is highly dependent upon individual factors such as:

• Our physical health
• The quality of our interpersonal relationships
• The number of commitments and responsibilities we carry
• The degree of others' dependence upon us, expectations of us
• The amount of support we receive from others
• The number of changes or traumatic events that have recently occurred in our lives.
Assessing the source of your stress

Take inventory of:
- Situations that cause you stress
- People that cause you stress
- Environments that cause your stress
- Stressful feelings
- Stressful thoughts

Now ask yourself...
- Of these stressors what can I change and what cannot be changed?
General Coping Skills

• Education:
  – know about the disease and its progression; it will become less scary
  – know about available resources for help; you will feel less overwhelmed

• Acceptance of the situation
  – You don’t want it, but don’t need to fight it
  – Your future may not be what you had in mind, but you can still make it good
General Coping Skills (cont.)

- Acceptance of yourself as a limited human being
  - Know yourself and set limits
  - You don’t have to do everything
  - The only person’s expectations you have to live up to are yours

- Knowledge that your loved one’s behaviors can’t be taken personally
  - Your care receiver’s anger, frustration, acting out, etc. are caused by the disease
  - These behaviors are not a choice, nor rational, nor aimed at you
General Coping Skills (cont.)

• Make long term plans to reduce anxiety about the future
  – Plan for all circumstances so decisions don’t have to be made during crisis
  – The plan should include legal and financial considerations
• Engage your “circle of support”
  – Have a family meeting to develop the long-term plan
  – Extend requests for caregiving helps to all family and friends
• Be flexible and keep your balance
  – If a plan does not work out, think of another
  – Seek support or professional help if you have difficulty
• Keep your sense of humor
• Name your problem in very specific words, e.g.,
  – “It is the repetition that gets me every time—I get so frustrated I want to scream “shut up”!
  – Think about when the situation occurs: maybe later in the day, or during periods of high stimulation
  – Think about contributing factors: my fatigue, my anger at feeling out of control
Problem-Solving: Step 2

Identify things that might cause the problem and keep you from solving it:

- loved one is tired, maybe over-stimulated, but then he/she begins repeating early in the day
- Maybe it is my reaction to the repetition: frustration and anger
• Brainstorm for creative ideas/options:
  • Can I change my loved one’s environment?
  • Maybe placement is the answer now?
  • Can I change my reaction of anger and frustration?
    – Idea: I can only control my reactions so I can let the situation unfold without feeling the need to fix it
    – Idea: I am frustrated because I want to undo the situation but I can “take a minute” and change or reframe my thoughts to be more positive
Problem-Solving: Step 4

- Weigh the pros and cons of each option
  - Placement is not the answer at this time
  - Changing my reactions to the situation feels like the best thing to do and I think I can, with practice
Problem-Solving: Step 5

Develop a plan, discuss, and rehearse any steps you need to rehearse:

- I plan to catch myself the next time I feel angry and frustrated with repetition.
- I plan to change the anger to a feeling of acceptance.
- I plan to replace the frustration with the knowledge that my dedication to my loved one is allowing him/her to remain at home for now and have a better quality of life.
Evaluate the results

- Did my plan work?
- What might have worked better?
- What changes would I like to make to my plan?
What is Caregiver SOS?

A caregiver support program that provides:

• **Wellness**-activity programming to support the physical and mental health of caregivers

• **Information**-assistance with care planning and referral to local community resources

• **Support** – groups that foster connections to other caregivers

• **Education**- Education on caregiver topics

Developing WISE caregivers!
Conclusion

• Questions?

• Contact Information: