Helping Caregivers to COPE

Continued from page 1

Deb needed to learn more about the disease and she was open to new knowledge and adapting strategies to manage better day-to-day,” says Vause-Earland.

Based on the assessments, Ms. Vause-Earland designed an “action plan” for Deb to follow. The plan included specific behavioral goals, a summary of Margaret’s abilities or what she could still do, and specific strategies for Deb to implement to enhance her mother’s participation in daily activities and decrease her boredom and anxiety. Since Margaret was once a housewife, Ms. Vause-Earland suggested activities such as washing dishes or folding laundry — pain-free activities that brought her satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and reflected her previous roles and interests. Ms. Vause-Earland also helped to establish a nighttime routine for Margaret: no coffee, taking a bath, playing soothing music and using a nightlight. The nighttime routine prepared her for bed in a relaxed manner and reduced her erratic nighttime behavior.

Beyond these strategies, Ms. Vause-Earland taught Deb how to build her own sense of efficacy as a caregiver. Through stress-relieving techniques and positive reinforcement, Ms. Vause-Earland gave Deb confidence and built her self-esteem. “Tracey taught me that I didn’t need to do everything for Mom; that it was okay to let go. She was the first person to tell me that I was doing a good job,” says Deb.

Ms. Vause-Earland saw Deb transform as a result of her participation in Project COPE. “Deb’s energy and enthusiasm and readiness to integrate new strategies into her daily caregiving transformed her situation,” asserts Vause-Earland. “By the end of her participation in the study, she had much more confidence in her abilities and a sense of mastery. Deb now feels empowered, more in control of her situation.”

Today, Deb is successfully coping with her mother’s disease and both are much happier as a result. “My mother now feels like she’s part of the family, rather than looking in from the outside. She’s happier now that I’m letting her be her. She is what she is today. You enjoy it and celebrate it. A tremendous burden has been lifted off of my shoulders.”

CARAH is still enrolling participants for Project COPE. For more information or to enroll in the study, please call 215-503-2897.

This article appeared in the July 18-31, 2007 edition of the City Suburban News.