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News

Caregivers must adapt when parents age, change, coordinator says

People age 85 and older are in the fastest growing age group in the nation

By Christina Alfaro
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Children and parents need to adapt when parents are aging and things change, Instructor Yvonne Lozano, coordinator of the gerontology program, said at brown bag event in the second part of a Caregiver Wellness Series.

This information session was sponsored by the Star Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and the college's Wellness Team.

This session "Aging Parents" March 29 focused on the process of aging and problems that can result.

Lozano, speaking to about 40 students, faculty and staff, said the fastest growing age group in this nation is 85 and older.

"Even if you don't want to work with them (seniors), it will be part of your life because personally we have something in common — we all get old and eventually die," she said.

Lozano said as people get older, relationships with parents change. When parents get older, they often realize they need help, and that is the point when grief starts, Lozano explained.

When someone begins to need help and relies on others, the person begins to lose money, friends, health and independence.



MANUEL DURÁN

Gerontology Coordinator Yvonne Lozano lectures on the effects of Alzheimer's disease in older adults March 29 in Longwith.

“People (seniors) in those situations then begin to wonder, when did this happen and when did it stop that we were not able to figure things out for ourselves?” she said.

Once parents have realized the beginning of losses, goals diminish. The caregiver or their children need to help the senior create new memories and stop talking about the same things, such as the weather and health.

Sometimes people forget that seniors have lived their lives and they have much more to offer. Therefore, one should talk about different topics.

Lozano defined self-esteem issues and how an older parent feels about physical changes or other problems that occur when getting older.

It is not easy to get used to the process of aging because “this nation is all about looking young and being beautiful,” she said.

When getting older, more and more problems occur that one does not even think about today because people take certain things for granted, such as transportation, Lozano said.

“Children often take things for granted such as that parents can always take care of themselves,” Lozano said. “We regret things and the would-have, should-have situation occurs and guilt takes over.”

Caregivers for seniors have to take into consideration that most men work their whole lives and put everything into their jobs, so when they retire the situation may become a critical issue, Lozano said.

It is difficult for men to lose their focus in life — their jobs. Retirement means change in one’s routine such as one’s children moving out of the house, she said. Today, the average age of males leaving the home is 28, Lozano said.

Lozano said after children leave the home, the husband and wife face each other again. A lot of times this situation can create chaos because everyone needs time to adapt to those new circumstances.

Relationship issues can result between the parents, Lozano said. When children decide to bring their parents to their home, they need to remember that some dynamics never change, such as the mother and father roles. They never stop being one’s parent, Lozano explained.

Children tend to take on the parental role and tell their parents what to do and how to do something. This kind of behavior aggravates the parents, she said.

Children need to remember that they are not the parent and they will have to realize there are

two adults in this relationship, Lozano said.

“Older people do not turn into little children, and so one cannot put them into time-out,” Lozano said.

If one treats their parents like children, they will react like children, she said.

This can be a difficult situation for everyone involved, so the question comes up, how do you adapt to change?

“We are creatures of habit, and I don’t care how old you are,” Lozano said.

One needs to make changes now and plan ahead, Lozano said. Everyone has someone in their family who does not talk to another family member, which can create problems physically and mentally.

Take care of regrets now, she said.

Besides family members who need to take some responsibility, senior citizens need to be prepared, and they need to have friends they can count on and socialize with, Lozano said.

“Socialization is important for the caregiver and seniors because we all like to go out and do things together,” she said.

Helen Flores, regional coordinator of the Alzheimer’s Association, took questions from the audience. One woman wanted to know what topics one could talk about or read to a senior.

“Talk about World War II or gardening because the long-term memory of seniors works very well,” Flores said.

Flores said it is important to keep seniors busy with activities such as reading stories to them that contain sentences to be completed to get them thinking.

Flores suggested getting seniors tested for Alzheimer’s disease. The Alzheimer’s Association, which provides a list of doctors, can be contacted at 822-6449. Log on to www.alz.org/ for more information.

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