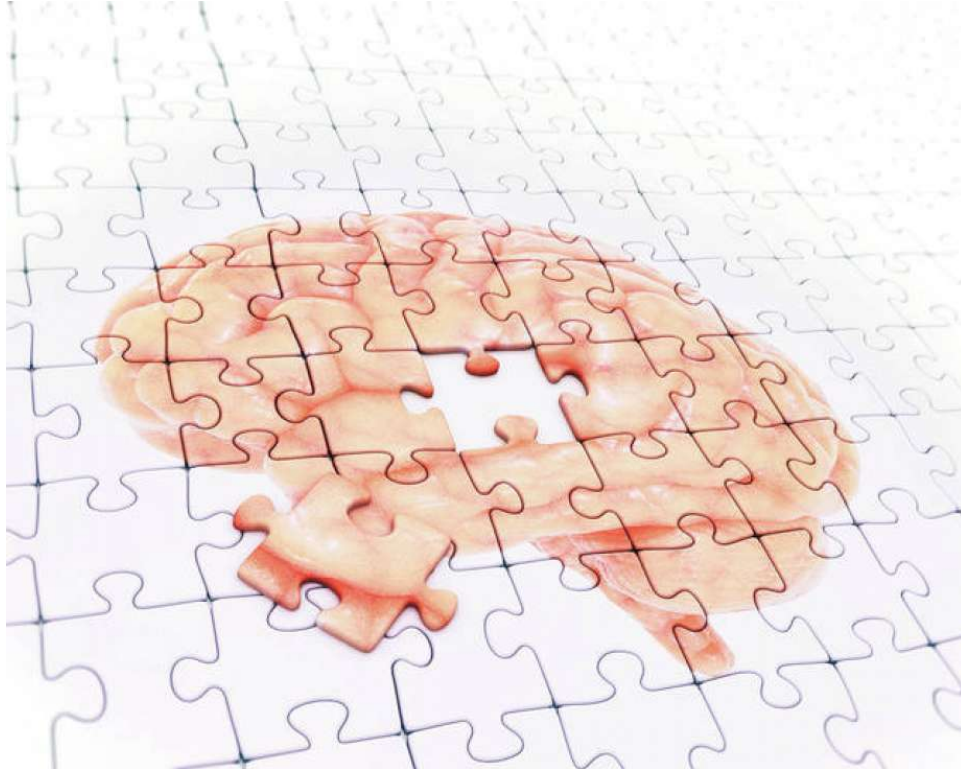


Group there to care for caregivers

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Taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia isn't easy.

The job can be even tougher if the caregiver lacks support.

That's where the Jacksonville Alzheimer's Support Group comes in. It's for those who want to talk and have someone

who will listen and understand – because there may be no one else who does, group members say.

“We can talk, we can listen, we can laugh, we can cry. We have people who have been there, done that, are still doing it,” said Dee Mayfield, the group’s facilitator and a certified dementia care consultant and trainer. “We mourn the loss, we fight the battle of getting this person to help take care of themselves and we try to learn not to argue with them.”

The support group can provide caregivers with information on a range of dementia-related topics, including ways to take care of their loved one and where to find resources to help, but it’s not just a learning tool.

“Support groups, when it comes to caregiving with any type of dementia, caregiving is a challenge,” said Stacy Fehring Kelly, manager of education and community volunteers at the Alzheimer’s Association Illinois chapter in Springfield.

Alzheimer’s disease is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms develop slowly and get worse over time, eventually becoming severe enough to interfere with daily function.

Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia, account for somewhere between 60% and 80% of dementia cases, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

Increasing age is a known risk factor and most with Alzheimer's are 65 or older.

Those who attend the support group meetings tend to be taking care of a loved one with dementia.

"One of the biggest expectations that I have is that everything is going to be different," said Jean, a support group participant who asked to be identified only by her first name for the privacy of her family member. "Each one of these people has shared something unique. It's a unique disease (unlike) a heart attack or stroke. We're just now starting to learn."

As a facilitator, Mayfield is there to offer participants information and her listening skills.

"We want to make sure that everyone in the community has a caregiving job, whether the loved one is at home with them, in a nursing home or assisted living. We're there to listen, we're there to answer questions, give ideas, just be there for that person," Mayfield said. "They can call at any time or just show up once in a while. It's their group for them."

"I think the main message our group wants to get out is that we're there for individuals in the community who are in a caregiving situation, especially first-timers," Mayfield said.

The group meets at 7 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Passavant Area Hospital, Meeting Room 6. It is not affiliated with the Alzheimer's Association or Passavant.

The next meeting is Feb. 17.

