

A Show of SUPPORT

Dr. Alma Abdel-Moty

Dr. Hector Huerta

OT faculty help empower and reenergize caregivers

Caring for a person with a progressive memory disorder such as Alzheimer's or dementia can be physically and emotionally daunting. Oftentimes it pushes caregivers to feel they've reached their limits. This is why the College has joined forces with the Brain Center neurology group to support them with the right outlook and tools to provide patient care without sacrificing their own self-care.

"Brain Center staff witnessed the strain on caregivers, especially family members who didn't have a healthcare background," said Helen Cornely, Ed.D., the College's associate dean of administration. The Center's CEO Jeffrey Horstmyer, M.D., approached Dr. Cornely to partner on developing and delivering a curriculum to help caregivers perform their duties while managing their personal circumstances.

FIU Occupational Therapy (OT) clinical faculty and licensed therapists Alma Abdel-Moty, Dr.OT., Hector Huerta, ODT, and FIU Physical Therapy (PT) clinical education director Teresa Muñecas, DPT, spearheaded the program's roll-out in spring 2018. With the collaboration of other OT and PT faculty, nearly 60 participants have benefited from the *Managing Alzheimer's and Dementia for the Caregiver* workshops.

The workshops combine OT and PT approaches for caregivers to better interact with their loved ones, including behavior management techniques for when the patient becomes difficult; healthier nutrition; suitable recreational activities; proper mobility and transfer techniques; medication and home safety; and routines to aid with activities of daily living (e.g., laying out their clothes, brushing their hair).

Empathy also plays an instructional role through the Dementia Live™ Experience. This experiential learning program simulates cognitive and sensory impairment to immerse participants into a life with dementia.

According to Dr. Abdel-Moty, the caregivers spend only a few minutes walking a mile in their loved one's shoes, "but it's a revelatory experience that results in deeper understanding and elevates their level of compassion for those living with the disease."

Dr. Huerta added that the OT mantra to "live life to its fullest" applies equally for the caregiver who has dedicated their life providing complete care to someone else.

"Each workshop session is unique because of the interactive nature of the group therapy. It was essential they had a safe space to address their struggles, share the emotional burden, and practice self-care techniques to help them hold on to aspects of their life outside the caregiver role."

He shared the reaction of one participant, who after just a second session with the caregiver support group, felt it positively changed her perspective toward the future.

Dr. Huerta noted these workshops are not a one-time remedy, but an ongoing means to provide encouragement, education and resources for caregivers to alleviate some of the enormity of their responsibility.

"They no longer feel alone in their struggle because we won't let them."

INSIDE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Interim Chair: Lynne Richard, PhD, OT/L
 Program(s): Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MS-OT)
 Student Enrollment (in and out of state): 160
 Number of Graduates: 55
 Graduation Rate: 98%
 Ultimate Licensure Pass Rate: 100%
 Full-Time Faculty: 9
 Accreditation(s):
 Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE)

Student Body Diversity:

