Personal Empowerment: An Underserved Need for the Person with Parkinson's

By: Walter Scott

Parkinson's support groups are available at Eisenhower. Following a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, it is natural for individuals to experience a range of emotions that includes denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages overlap and can recur with varying levels of impact as the disease progresses.

Depression is both a recognized symptom of Parkinson's and an understandable reaction to a disease with no known cure.

Therefore, it is likely to persist to some degree and to become exacerbated from time to time as a result of life circumstances.

Current treatment options range from medication to exercise to nutrition and beyond. Throughout, the support of a caregiver takes on increasing importance.

As patients become increasingly dependent on the ministrations of others, they seek to reaffirm themselves as independent, competent, and selfreliant individuals. This reaffirmation is a critical factor in a healthy adjustment to life with Parkinson's. It has been demonstrated that peer interaction is a source of learning that can be more powerful for adults than the expertise of an authority figure. It would follow that the sharing of feelings and experiences with other Parkinsonians would have an impact beyond the usual patienttreatment mode.

Common experience reveals that giving is more rewarding than receiving. Contributing to others is empowering to the contributor. And yet the Parkinson's sufferer accumulates a weight of gratitude in the role of receiver. What is often lacking is a vehicle for experiencing the self as both giver and contributor.

To address this need, the Phillip and Carol Traub Parkinson's Center has created a new program supplementary to its existing resources. It is a weekly self-help group in which participants share with each other their feelings and experiences coping with the impact of Parkinson's. The purpose is to give peers the opportunity to champion each other in a safe and supportive environment, guided by a qualified facilitator. The objective is to have participants leave the group feeling a renewed capability and selfworth.

Walter Scott is a Palm Springs resident who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in December 2002.

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