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## **CU Aging Center: Helping caregivers in distress de-stress**

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Being a caregiver for an aging family member or loved one can be daunting, frustrating and even isolating; questions seem endless and the resources limited. Caregivers in El Paso County, however, have a place to find answers and myriad avenues of support.

The CU Aging Center, which opened in 1999, is a community-based mental health and psychology training clinic affiliated with the University of Colorado Colorado Springs doctoral program in clinical psychology.

"We offer clinical psychology with a specialty in geropsychology," said UCCS assistant professor Michael Kenny, clinic director. "We're one of only four in the country."

The past year, the center assisted more than 2,400 seniors and their families, providing more than 9,000 hours of psychological services. Its services are offered on a sliding scale and are often free. "Nobody has ever been turned away because of an inability to pay," Kenny stressed.

The center has been a godsend for many in the community:

"I would never have been able to convince my daughter to let me stay in my own home without your help," wrote a senior. "She was so worried I would fall that she wanted me to move to a nursing home. You helped us work out a plan that lets me stay home, but she is not so worried."

A caregiver wrote, "Thank you for showing my brother and me how to work together to help Mom. We were on a path to never speaking again when we came into the aging center. Now we are supporting each other on almost a daily basis."

The CU Aging Center works with its partners to factor in physical health when assessing the patient's psychological welfare.

"We had a person who came to us, did our memory clinic, and we identified that there were things other than memory going on," Kenny said. "We referred her to Peak Vista and they did a medical evaluation. She had diabetes and is now being treated and she had some associated mild depression. So they helped with the medical end and we were able to provide some therapy."

"This person went from really not doing much of anything to applying for work and was able to get a part-time job," he said.

The center's partners include the Area Agency on Aging, Peak Vista and Pikes Peak Hospice. The Area Agency on Aging helps fund the caregiver program, "We have a psycho-educational group and also six sessions at no cost, and that's really to help people reduce caregiver distress, which is sizable," Kenny said.

Both patients and UCCS students benefit through the Peak Vista partnership. "They have two senior clinics. Our student clinicians are in their clinics working with their physicians and nurse practitioners," he said.

Between 10 and 15 students in varying degrees of their development are trained through the center. Some students are in the second year in their Ph.D. program, others are part of an internship program. "We have two clinical interns and we usually have a post-doc fellow," he said. "The students come do their practicums with us. They learn how to do therapy, how to do neuropsychological evaluations; we're a psychology training clinic and an agency for the community."

National statistics show that one-in-four adults has a mental disorder. "In our Colorado Springs area, that translates to 30,000 people," Kenny said. "Upwards of 70 percent of people either don't receive or pursue any treatment for their problems."

To counter this, CUAC offers a complete range of mental health services through four programs:

- The Memory and Neuropsychological Assessment Clinics, which provide screening for cognitive impairment and full neuropsychological testing.
- The Aging Families and Caregiver Program, which provides Coping with Caregiving classes and specialized services to help caregiver families with caregiver burden.
- The Psychotherapy Program, which offers interventions for the full range of

psychological problems.

- The Clinicians in the Community programs, which offer services through collaborative projects with the Rocky Mountain Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), Peak Vista Community Senior Health Centers, Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging and Pikes Peak Hospice.

The demand for the center's services is high after the memory clinic was featured in the Colorado Springs Gazette, "We got flooded."

The payoff is high as well. "Particularly in the group sessions, you hear that other folks are dealing with the same kind of distress and you get ideas on how to manage it," Kenny said. "But also you realize, yeah, you're not alone."

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