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News Release

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A 21st Century Caregiver Education Program funded for Atlanta Veterans suffering from dementia

Over 5 million people have Alzheimer's disease today. The negative impacts of dementia can influence many aspects of family life, including physical health, emotional health, social relationships, and legal and financial issues. Family caregivers are often not well-positioned to provide optimal care for a Veteran if their well-being is affected by any of these negative aspects. Developing ways to help caregivers be more effective and knowledgeable about their role and less distressed has been the passion of one researcher at the Atlanta VA's Center of Excellence for Visual and Neurocognitive Rehabilitation (CVNR).

Dr. Patricia C. Griffiths, CVNR Researcher and Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) Education Core member, received a "Transforming Care in the 21st Century" award from the Department of Veterans Affairs this year. The award allows her to offer the Savvy Caregiver program to family caregivers of Veterans affected with dementing illnesses using telehealth technology. Dr. Griffiths and her Atlanta VA Dementia Committee Colleagues will collaborate with Dr. Ken Hepburn, ADRC Education Core Director and one of the original authors of the Savvy Caregiver program, to translate the program so that it can be offered to caregivers for Veterans through tele-health devices.

The Savvy Caregiver program is an education program, based on previous research findings, offered in two-hour weekly sessions that enables caregivers to acquire caregiving skills and knowledge – and a clinical outlook. The program has been shown to help caregivers be more effective in their caregiving and to help them avoid some of the burdens that are a usual part of their role. Tele-Savvy, as the VA program will be called, will allow individual caregivers of Veterans to take part in brief daily learning modules as well as six, weekly hour-long, virtual "face to face" group learning sessions, all of which will be accessed on an electronic tablet in the comfort and privacy of their own homes at a time that is convenient to them.

Dr. Griffiths adds, "We are very excited to offer the Tele-Savvy Program – free of charge - to the dedicated and selfless men and women who are caring for our Veterans with dementia. To be able to bring the program to these individuals so that they might participate without leaving home is an especially compelling and innovative feature of this program!"

For more information about this program for family caregivers of Veterans, contact project coordinator Kate Whitney at mary.whitney@va.gov or call 404-321-6111 X 2770.