

Cartoons offer an important message for carers

June 3 2015, by Michelle Blowes

A new animated series created by the University of Sydney and Alzheimer's Australia NSW uses cartoons to deliver a serious message about how to care for loved ones with dementia.

The cartoons for carers, called 'CareToons', are designed to help carers manage issues related to [behavioural change](#) which is estimated to effect between 60 and 90 per cent of people with [dementia](#) living at home.

Associate Professor Lee-Fay Low from the University of Sydney's Faculty of Health Sciences said 1.2 million Australians are involved in caring for people with dementia and the project gives family carers online access to practical strategies that can help in [stressful situations](#).

"Caring for a loved one with dementia can be immensely challenging and dealing with changes in behaviour is one of the biggest sources of stress for carers," Associate Professor Low said.

"Sometimes even a small habit like asking the same question over and over, or continually losing things can cause a great deal of angst if people don't understand why it's happening or have strategies to handle it.

"The CareToons are a fun way of giving carers access to proven strategies in their own home so they don't have to find someone to look after their loved one or travel to attend a group for advice."

The cartoons cover a range of behavioural changes common to people

with dementia including not sleeping at night, wanting to go home when they are already home, suspecting that others are stealing from them, and not wanting to socialise. At the request of carers the cartoons are silent so they can be watched quietly.

The series was developed based on the experiences of carers like Imelda Gilmore, who cares for her husband Graham.

"Almost always, when I have had a need for a solution in caring for my husband, I have been alone," Mrs Gilmore said.

"To be able to find help without the need for going anywhere or calling anyone is a very powerful asset."

"With CareToons, I can go to the website, quickly spot the description of the problem I need help with and within two minutes I can see one or more solutions to my problem depicted in an easy to follow cartoon.

"Best of all, I can complete a check sheet to keep for next time and if I still need more help, I'm given details of who to call.

"This has the power to change my approach to the problem from feeling stressed and seemingly helpless to feeling less alone and armed with hope for a good outcome."

The Hon. John Watkins, CEO of Alzheimer's Australia NSW, said the CareToons are an innovative solution for time-pressed carers.

"The strength of these resources is that they are based on real scenarios, identified by people currently caring for someone with dementia.

"There is an estimated 324,000 people living with dementia in Australia, and about 70 per cent of those live at home.

"We hope these will help provide useful strategies and information for carers navigating what can be a challenging time."

The researcher team from the University of Sydney will compare the effectiveness of the cartoon resources to traditional fact-sheets.

More information: The study is designed for carers of people with moderate to severe dementia. For more information on the study or to register your interest visit www.caretoons.com.au

Provided by University of Sydney

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