

# Speaking With Barry Rovner, MD

**Q:** What Alzheimer's related studies are you involved in currently at the Farber Institute for Neurosciences?

**Dr. Rovner:** We are evaluating three exciting new disease-modifying drug treatments that may slow down the course of Alzheimer's disease. I am also a Principal Investigator of Jefferson's Center for Excellence in Neurodegenerative Diseases funded by

the Pennsylvania Department of Health Tobacco Settlement

testing in-home skills training services to delay nursing home placement and reduce stress for a racially diverse group of family caregivers. This latter study is being conducted at the Center for Applied Research on Aging and Health, by Principal Investigator Laura N. Gitlin, PhD.

**“Participating in research allows families ...to get potentially beneficial treatments for their relatives before they are**

## Did You Know?

**As many as 80 percent of persons with dementia are cared for in their homes by family members.**

caregiving, as well as provide the chance to make a contribution to new scientific knowledge. It is an opportunity to share personal experiences so that others may benefit

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methods to identify dementia in community-based agencies serving older adults, as well as

Dr. Barry Rovner is Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology and Director of Clinical Alzheimer's Disease Research of the Farber Institute for Neurosciences. The focus of his research is to test novel interventions to improve cognition, prevent depression and enhance quality of life for older adults.

**Q:** What do study participants gain from being part of these research studies?

**Dr. Rovner:** We have learned that families derive a lot of hope and support from participating in these trials. In general, participating in research allows families to have the opportunity to get the best possible care for their relatives, including potentially beneficial treatments before they are available to the general public. Being a participant may lead to a decrease in the stress of

drug trials?

**Dr. Rovner:** With trials of medications, there are always some risks of side effects, however we closely monitor any possible adverse reactions. Drugs being studied have already been tested before so that we can assure that they are reasonably safe. ■

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## Helping Caregivers to COPE *Continued from page 1*

home to instruct her on practical methods she could use to cope with her mother's progressive illness. She began by assessing Margaret's cognitive level as well as Deb's caregiving goals, understanding of the disease and willingness to learn new strategies. She found that Margaret had a high cognitive level and was receiving unnecessary help from her caring daughter. "Out of concern and an unclear understanding of her mom's abilities, Deb was actually helping her mother too much. Deb needed to learn more about the disease and she was open to new knowledge and adapting strategies to manage better day-to-day," says Vause-Earland.

Based on the assessments, Ms. Vause-Earland designed an "action plan" for Deb to follow. The plan included specific behavioral goals, a summary of Margaret's abilities or what she could still do, and specific strategies for Deb to implement to enhance her mother's participation in daily activities and decrease her boredom and anxiety. Since Margaret was once a housewife, Ms. Vause-Earland

suggested activities such as washing dishes or folding laundry — pain-free activities that brought her satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and reflected her previous roles and interests. Ms. Vause-Earland also helped to establish a nighttime routine for Margaret: no coffee, taking a bath, playing soothing music and using a nightlight. The nightly routine prepared her for bed in a relaxed manner and reduced her erratic nighttime behavior.

Beyond these strategies, Ms. Vause-Earland taught Deb how to build her own sense of efficacy as a caregiver. Through stress-relieving techniques and positive reinforcement, Ms. Vause-Earland gave Deb confidence and built her self-esteem. "Tracey taught me that I didn't need to do everything for Mom; that it was okay to let go. She was the first person to tell me that I was doing a good job," says Deb.

Ms. Vause-Earland saw Deb transform as a result of her participation in Project COPE.

"Deb's energy and enthusiasm and readiness to integrate new strategies into her daily caregiving transformed her situation," asserts Vause-Earland. "By the end of her participation in the study, she had much more confidence in her abilities and a sense of mastery. Deb now feels empowered, more in control of her situation."

Today, Deb is successfully coping with her mother's disease and both are much happier as a result. "My mother now feels like she's part of the family, rather than looking in from the outside. She's happier now that I'm letting her be her. She is what she is today. You enjoy it and celebrate it. A tremendous burden has been lifted off of my shoulders."

CARAH is still enrolling participants for Project COPE. For more information or to enroll in the study, please call **215-503-2897**. ■

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