

MS victims adapting to hard times with help

By Karin Gregory

Staff Writer

Larry is a war veteran, Barbara is a housewife, Kathy is a mother and the wife of a UTA professor. Every Wednesday afternoon they get together with about eight others in a tiny room on Main Street to discuss their lives.

All members of the group have one thing in common. Each has multiple

sclerosis. They are learning to cope with their handicap by talking to other MS patients at the Arlington Multiple Sclerosis Self-Help Unit.

Two second-year graduate students from the Community Service Clinic of the Graduate School of Social Work supervise the group every week from 1 to 3 p.m.

Kathleen Steven and Faith Sisney have been working with the group about five weeks, and bring profes-

sionals to speak on how to deal with the disease. Last week a physical therapist from Arlington Memorial Hospital described exercises for strength and control. Wednesday someone from the clinic will talk on self-hypnosis.

"These people were isolated," Steven said, "and now their self-image is going to improve about areas in which they have no self-control."

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic disease of the central nervous system that attacks the 20-45 age group. The nerves affected control walking, speech, vision and hearing.

The self-help unit here is run by Andy Wallace, and MS victim who opened it in June.

"The main idea," Wallace said, "is MS people helping other MS people. I've found that to be the key to the whole thing."

Wallace asked the Community Service Clinic to send two students to observe and work with the group. The clinic, which offers marriage and family counseling and some group therapy, is part of the Human Resource Center in the Graduate School of Social Work.

"The people were presenting a number of problems he (Wallace) did not feel competent to deal with," Steven said.

One of the problems was marital. Steven and Sisney seemed a likely choice for the job because they are going into direct social work practice and have done quite a bit of marriage counseling.

"But Faith and I didn't know anything about MS before we got into this," Steven said.

One of the misconceptions people have about MS is that it is contagious. This, Steven said, "makes people walk around you, instead of up to you."

'When I reached out for help there wasn't anybody there and I'm trying to be there . . .'

Group members discuss their disease with frankness and humor. Kathy had asked the therapist about spasticity.

"After I've been writing awhile," she noted, "my hand starts going off the page like Vincent Price in 'The Fly.'"

Larry used to do needlepoint, but his coordination and vision no longer allow it. With Barbara, fatigue is a problem.

"I can cook a meal," she said, "but I'm tired after it. That's one week's work, cooking a day's meal."

The three are trying to make sense out of their predicament with the aid of

the self-help unit manned by three volunteers, all of whom have MS.

Wallace needs financial aid and money for lunches for the volunteers. Dodge of Arlington donated a van and Midway Office Supply donated most of the office equipment. Ted Arendale Ford promised Wallace a 1978 LTD and a smaller car.

Wallace pays the insurance on the cars out of the money he receives from Social Security for complete disability and from his veteran's pension.

Last Saturday the organization had a fund-raising booth at Traders Village. Local business donated cash and materials for the booth.

"I've carried the financial burden for five months," Wallace said. "I've got 80 people that are depending upon this organization very heavily, so I would have to go broke before I closed down."

When Wallace began the self-help unit, he was counseling nine male patients. Publicity from newspapers and television news helped bring in more patients.

"It gave me something to do," he said. "I was in a crisis myself. I had my life destroyed at about 30 or 31, and this was a chance to help people going through the same thing I was going through."

Wallace's disease was diagnosed in October 1975, when he was about 31, but he'd had the symptoms since he was in his mid-20s. The disease is affecting his optic nerves, and he says it's only a matter of time until he's blind.

He said this is one reason he's rushing around trying to relieve the unit of its heavy financial problems. But he said he won't stop working with his patients, even when he's blind.

"When I reached out for help there wasn't anybody there," he recalls, "and I'm trying to be there when they need help."

"Yes, I had never talked with anyone who had MS," Barbara said. "I thought I was the only one who had it. I knew there were others, but I didn't know them."

Because of lack of space, Wallace said he has to limit the Wednesday group to about 10 or 15 people. But the vice-president on the unit's board of directors, Truman Thompson from Arlington National Bank, was in Wednesday to observe. He indicated

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Today

Thousands of students participate in the intramural program yearly, yet no one knows the real Doug Kuykendall. Just who is this fellow and what does he have to do with intramurals? For the answers see Mike Hashimoto's profile on page 8.

WEATHER — Well, hot damn. Winter finally has arrived. After sweltering through the first part of November in balmy 70-degree weather, today's high will reach only into the low 50s. Don't look for warmer nights either, as lows will plunge into the 30s. Winds will be 15-25 mph.