



WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS ...

Why is it that some of us are better than others at making lemonade? No, not the refreshing summertime drink. In regard to the proverbial “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade,” what makes some people able to adjust to changes and adversity better than others?

Dr. Abir Bekhet, assistant professor of nursing, is finding out why. She studies older adults who have relocated to assisted or independent living facilities, evaluating how well new residents might adjust to that life-altering change.

“All of my research studies have consistently focused on ‘positive concepts,’ such as strengths and assets of individuals, rather than shortcomings, deficits and disorders,” says Bekhet. “More specifically, I’m interested in the concepts of positive cognitions and resourcefulness.”

In one study, Bekhet taught small groups of relocated residents personal and social resourcefulness strategies, such as reliance on family and friends, exchanging ideas with others, reframing situations positively, and exploring new ideas. She also asked residents to respond to “positive cognition” statements, such as “I am hopeful about my future” and “I am in control of my life” to measure how well residents were able to think positively. Then she assessed the effectiveness of what she taught the residents by asking them which aspects were most helpful and what could be improved. And for residents who lacked strong positive thinking and

resourcefulness, Bekhet showed them they could still change.

“Personal resourcefulness is learned,” says Bekhet. “We learn it through conditioning, modeling and formal or informal instruction. And since it is learned, it can be taught.” With that in mind, Bekhet has also examined strategies that staff in assisted and independent living facilities can use to help new residents adjust.

Bekhet says that resourcefulness strategies can be applied to any stressful situation, not just the relocation of older adults. With more than 20 published or accepted articles about positive cognition and resourcefulness, and funding from the nursing honor society, she next plans to broaden her research. “I would like to expand my resourcefulness intervention studies to other high-risk populations, such as caregivers of individuals with dementia,” she says. — TO