



September 2012

Sensitivity in Alzheimer's Diagnosis

Often, after having received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or even "Mild Cognitive Impairment" (MCI), families tell me that they were sent home without a road map; only advice that they schedule a follow up appointment months in the future. The lives of these individuals and families have just been altered and, without some direction, they become anxious, worried, depressed, and sad. The days for these families then become colored with a dark crayon!

The darkness prevents many from being able to be "in the "moment". With this cloud over their heads, they cannot cherish the beauty of nature, the smile of a child, the cultivating of a garden or the unconditional love of a pet. Ideally the emphasis should be on enjoying the "here and now" and not on those fears of what the future might hold.

It is normal to grieve a future that will now be altered. Many individuals with this disease, and their families, will need counseling, education and support so that, despite the diagnosis, everyone can find enjoyment and laughter in their day to day lives.

However, not all diagnoses are given without support - wonderful compassionate professionals and clinics can, and often do, assist families. Patients are then able to plan for a future with resources, support and, most of all, hope for many good days and/or new treatments.

While it is hard to synthesize this information at first, it is usually a confirmation of what the family may have suspected. A loving spouse or an adult child would never want to experience this difficult journey, but the diagnosis confirms their suspicions.

When one is given a diagnosis that has no real cure, that individual and/or the family caregiver needs to focus on what can be enjoyed, not on what can't be



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done or what might happen in the future. The present moment becomes much more precious.

Being realistic and keeping the family member safe needs to be taken into consideration, but so do these other concerns:

1) The family caregiver may have to do more of the chores, tasks and errands that can overwhelm or confuse the person with a dementia. Early in the process, individuals can be left alone, but, as the disease progresses, a friend, neighbor or paid caregiver might need to come and "visit" while the family caregiver is gone. Please note that I say "visit" – because the person with dementia will usually say they don't need a "babysitter".

Family members need to say, "Burt, the next door neighbor is coming over to show you pictures of his boat trip while I run to the post office." Protecting dignity is the goal early in the process and you will want to do this no matter how much you think the afflicted person understands.

2) Choices are hard as individuals progress in the disease. Instead of saying "Get dressed," lay out the clothing in the proper order to be put on and then let the family member get dressed alone. Again, this helps preserve dignity and abilities by allowing them to do it on their own without taking over and making them feel child-like. This may take more time, so, as family members, we need

to work on patience.

At Eldercare Services, we offer "dementia coaching" where primary caregivers meet with a professional once a month, similar to a private support group. Family caregivers can ask for help on specific issues. Challenges in daily care are matched with creative ideas that both protect the senior's dignity and "preserve" and "empower" family caregivers.

We provide free support groups and classes for those who have a diagnosis, but need a better map. Keep in mind the destination will change as the illness progresses. Sometimes new maps are needed because of changes in caregiver health or energy as well as changes in the progressive illness.

Until there is a breakthrough on treatments that stop Alzheimer's, the only true intervention or treatment is "behavioral." There are medications that improve functioning, but don't stop the progression of the illness and can't be used on everyone for various reasons.

Enjoy the moment – for that is all any of us have. Even individuals with pain can take in the beauty of nature, if only for seconds. Those with a dementia, like Alzheimer's, are adults who deserve dignity and respect to the very end of their lives.

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from time off or self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.



Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Alameda County, San Francisco, Marin County and the Tri-Valley, CA.

Visit us on the web at www.EldercareAnswers.com for more information.

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

What You Wanted to Know About Dementia But Were Afraid to Ask

3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Cost for Classes: None

Class Registration:

Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM

605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups: None

Support Group Registration: Not required

More Info: (925) 937-2018 or (415) 469-8300



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