

## Communication & Alzheimer's Disease Avoiding Arguments

### SUPPORT GROUP

**Mild Cognitive Impairment**  
Education & Support Group for  
Families affected by MCI

**Next Meeting: October 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Time: 9:30am**

**Topic: The ABC's of  
Downsizing**

**Speaker: Trudy Clark,  
Solutions for Carefree  
Moving**

**Location:  
Senior Friendship  
Center- Center for  
Healthy Aging  
1900 Brother Geenen  
Way, Sarasota**

### THE MEMORY DISORDER CLINIC

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Department of Elder Affairs

Does any of the following sound familiar? "I've told her not to put things in the trash can, but she doesn't listen." "He tells me that he wants to go home. This is his home. We've lived here for 35 years. He gets mad at me when I tell him this is home." "I get frustrated when Mom asks me what day it is. I start to lose my patience when I answer her for the fifth time."

These common phrases are repeated daily by Alzheimer caregivers. Families have a hard time accepting changes in communication with this illness. It is also hard to let go of old habits like arguing or reasoning with your spouse, parent or friend who does not understand what you say.

#### Remember to...

Keep in mind that brain changes cause communication problems and irrational behavior. Your loved one is not behaving this way to annoy or irritate you. In fact, he is probably not aware of the impact of his actions.

Try to realize that you don't always have to be right. For instance, you will never "teach" your mother not to hide things in the wastebaskets. Instead, your family will learn to accept this behavior and check the wastebaskets before emptying them. Pick your battles before you start an argument.

Don't try to reason with the person. The woman whose husband wanted to go home only frustrated both of them when she tried to explain that they were home. She learned to walk with her husband to the corner and return home. When her husband entered the house, he felt like he was home. It may be necessary to make our loved one's realities conform to ours.

Distract the AD (Alzheimer's Disease) person instead of confronting him. Perhaps you have hidden the keys to the car, and Dad wants them. Instead of explaining why it isn't a good idea for him to drive, suggest that you'll help him. "I'll help you look for those keys, but first let's sort these clothes. We really need to get this done." Wait for an opportunity to redirect Dad without pushing his concerns aside.

Be prepared to repeat yourself. When Mom asks a question over and over again, you will have to repeat the answer because of her lack of short-term memory. However, this can also work to your advantage. Distract Mom by offering her some ice cream and directing the conversation another way, or write the answer on a card or message pad and have her refer to it when needed.

Hopefully these simple techniques will begin to ease the frustration of caregivers and families affected by Alzheimer's Disease.

## **Observe the Warning Signs of Driving and Dementia**

Caregivers must determine when their loved one's attention span, distance perception or the ability to process information makes it unsafe for them to respond in driving situations. Their driving skills must be frequently observed.

Caregivers can easily miss the early warning signs of driving problems:

- Incorrect Signaling
- Trouble Navigating turns
- Moving into a wrong lane
- Confusion at exits
- Parking inappropriately
- Hitting curbs
- Driving at inappropriate speeds
- Delayed responses to unexpected situations
- Not anticipating dangerous situations
- Increased agitation or irritation when driving
- Scrapes or dents on car, garage or mailbox
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Near misses
- Ticketed moving violations or warnings
- Car accident
- Confusing gas and brake pedals
- Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason

**Families need to consider the circumstances and seriousness of unsafe driving practices to decide whether to continue monitoring, modify driving or stop driving immediately.**

**Driving evaluations are available at Sarasota Memorial Hospital for further information call 917-1385.**

## **Managing Money**

A person with dementia may be unable to balance the checkbook, make change or may become irresponsible with their money. As a person's brain becomes less able to remember what is really happening, they may become anxious and suspicious that their money is being stolen.

Since money often represents independence, they may be unwilling to give up control of their finances. You may consider gradually taking over some responsibilities, or balancing the checkbook and paying bills together. Some families avoid conflicts by giving their loved one small amounts of spending money while the family keeps control of the checkbook. Then if the spending money is lost or given away, it is only a minimal amount.

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### **Diagnosis: Mild Cognitive Impairment- What can I do?**

Persons with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) should be made aware of their diagnosis and do everything possible to stay healthy and preserve brain function. Reduction of risk factors associated with the common causes of dementia such as vascular and heart disease could help maintain cognitive function. The regulation of blood pressure, control of cholesterol and stopping smoking are all good suggestions. Finally, make healthy life style choices such as eating right, exercising regularly, staying mentally active and involved with activities you enjoy.

If you have a diagnosis of MCI, get prepared for the future with long term care planning. Visit the MCI support group monthly. For more information call

## The Present

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the only window in the room. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs and things they had done in their lives.

Every afternoon, when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one hour periods where his world would be broadened by all the activity of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake where ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite details, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine this picturesque scene. One warm afternoon, the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although they could not hear the band - he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days, weeks and months passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to check on the gentlemen when she found that the man by the window, had passed away during the night.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take a look out the window. But the window

## The Present (continued)

faced a blank wall. Puzzled by this the man asked the nurse why his former roommate would have described such wonderful things outside the window that were not there. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the blank wall. She said, 'Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you.'

### Epilogue:

There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations.

Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled.

If you want to feel rich, just count all the things you have that money can't buy.

**'Today is a gift, that is why it is called  
The Present.'**

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### Timeline Tidbits

**1930-** Mickey Mouse comic strip makes first appearance.

**1945-** Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Poland is liberated.

**1955-** Elvis Presley appears on television for the first time.

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### NEW Location for Memory Clinic

**Sarasota Memorial Hospital  
Memory Disorder Clinic  
Institute for Advanced Medicine  
5880 Rand Blvd., # 205  
Sarasota, FL 34238  
(941) 917-7197**

**Located just 1/2 mile from I-75 on the  
south side of Clark Road.**

[www.sarasotageriatrics.com](http://www.sarasotageriatrics.com)