

ALZHEIMER AWARENESS

There are many types of dementia but they are all diseases of the brain which invariably result in: difficulties with everyday tasks like handling money and decision making; problems with communication, such as language or word finding and personality and behaviour changes.

Being diagnosed with any form of Dementia carries with it an unfortunate societal stigma. Why is that? It is not a disease anyone could have prevented by lifestyle or diet. It is caused by changes in the brain which can be detected by a CT scan. Some people refuse to get an Alzheimer's diagnosis due to this stigma prevalent in today's society.

Early diagnosis is most important. It allows people with dementia and their families to receive timely information, advice and support. This can result in treatment beginning sooner and can be more effective for longer periods of time. It is the right of all to receive a dignified diagnosis. There are medications available which have proven to slow down the inevitable progress of this disease, if the disease is in its early stages. This allows the person to engage in lifelong activities with enjoyment. Exercise is vital as long as possible. This can be in the form of walking, urban poling, even playing golf and hockey. Social interaction is essential daily and often.

If you observe changes in behaviour such as increased anger outbursts, aggressive actions, unusual memory lapses and emotional reactions, take the person to her family physician for a first diagnosis. Probably she/he will be referred to the North East Specialized Geriatric Centre on Notre Dame St. behind Pioneer Manor. We are fortunate in Sudbury to have 3 highly qualified specialists

there namely, Dr. James Chau, Dr. Jo-Anne Clark, Dr. Susan Lane. It may take a little time to get an appointment. Cognitive test results are shared with her/his health care provider. In the meantime, contact the Alzheimer Society where many supportive services are available for the client as well as for her/his caregiver, in both English and French.

The Mission Statement of the Alzheimer Society states, “to alleviate the personal and social consequences of Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementias and to improve the quality of life of our clients, their care partners and families.”

Services offered by the Alzheimer Society for the client include urban poling, chair yoga, art therapy, Minds in Motion, cycling without age. Day programs are available for the clients to provide respite to the one responsible for giving care. Facilitators work with the families of the person living with dementia who demonstrates responsive behaviours, assisting them with supportive strategies. Support groups are invaluable to the caregivers where they learn coping mechanisms to react more positively with their loved one in a way that is meaningful to them. These groups are led by trained facilitators. Members can experience emotional relief and are able to connect with each other in shared experiences. This is most important as the job of caregiving can become very burdensome without this support. Learning about the necessity of self-care and coping skills is very important. This enables the care partner to be more attuned to their loved one. Communicating with the person living with Alzheimer’s Disease can become difficult without learning these skills.

Dementia numbers in Canada are monumental and as the population ages will increase exponentially. Some stats you might find interesting are as follows:

65% of Canadians over the age of 65 who have dementia are women; 25,000 new cases of dementia are diagnosed each year in Canada; the average family physician in Canada has 30-40 patients with some form of dementia; \$10.4 billion is spent annually by Canadians to care for people with dementia; smoking increases the risk of having some form of dementia by 45%.

The Alzheimer Society offers Blue Umbrella Training to businesses, libraries, organizations to teach staff how to deal with people living with any form of dementia such as Alzheimer's, all it takes is a request to the association and a trained Alzheimer Education Staff person will arrange a convenient time with you to present a 30 minute session on how to best serve those living with dementia in our community. At the end of this, a blue umbrella decal will be given for the business to affix to a window near the entrance to indicate that such training has taken place in that establishment. Look for it.