

Aging population means growing number of dementia diagnoses

By Ellen Waldman

May 3, 2016

I attended the Oregon State University's (OSU) 40th annual Gerontology Conference in Corvallis last month. It is always enlightening to see what's new in the world of research and information. Currently, Oregon is undertaking a huge project to address the coming tide of those diagnosed with dementia and their families who care for them.

Here are some actual figures for Oregon (from 2015 Alzheimer's disease Facts and Figures report at: www.alz.org/facts):

- This year, 60,000 people will be diagnosed with dementia; by 2025, that will increase 40 percent to 84,000.
- In 2012, 1,312 deaths were caused by this disease, and is the sixth leading cause of death in Oregon. (I found out that of the top-10 causes of death, this is the only disease that as yet has no known cause, treatment or cure.)
- Oregon has the 10th highest Alzheimer's death rate in America. In the whole country, nearly one in three seniors who dies each year dies from Alzheimer's or a related dementia.
- In 2014, there were 175,000 caregivers providing 200 million hours of unpaid care, with a total value of more than \$2.4 billion, and creating \$1 billion-plus of higher health costs to the caregivers.

To address this unending and growing need, each state has been mandated to create a plan. In Oregon, it's called the "State Plan for Alzheimer's disease in Oregon" and known by the acronym SPADO. As in many areas of advance care planning and end-of-life issues, Oregon is doing a wonderful job putting together a viable plan. At this moment, there is still only a draft version of what's coming in the near future.

Basically, there will be a comprehensive roadmap for families, and a separate one for providers of medical services, to assist in finding the appropriate resources, the steps to take, and other important guidelines. For now, here's what you can access while we wait for the final forms and websites to be fully operational.

- The Aging and Disability Resource Connections of Oregon (ADRC) has set up a special link on their site related to dementia. To access this, go to: www.helpforalz.org. There is an abundance of wonderful material on that site.
- "Help is Here, When Someone You Love Has Dementia," written by a physician and an attorney who both presented at the OSU Gerontology Conference, is available online at oregon.providence.org/our-services/d/dementia. It's written in simple, easy-to-understand language, for those who are just too busy or overwhelmed to wade through a long, complex book.

I will let you know when the state of Oregon site is fully functional. At that point, all will be “live,” and all the documents and links they currently recommend will be easily accessible. There is a good reason for all this planning. As indicated by the statistics above, there will be a huge need for more services and resources, and the costs will be astronomical. My impression is that the state is focused on training families and caregivers to assume the majority of this care providing, but acknowledges the toll is exacts on them as well. It is more and more obvious that a thorough education is going to be key for everyone faced with their own or another’s aging process.

How else can you get this education now, before the state website is up and running? There are wonderful, local, no-fee courses, in person and online through Oregon Care Partners (oregoncarepartners.com). Also, Lori Stanton, regional director of the Medford chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association (541-772-2230) is a wonderful resource for support groups and other valuable information.

Speaking of local information, many people have asked if I would put my columns into a book so that the resources could be easily at hand. These columns are now available in book and Kindle format. “Aging Happens: One Year of Columns from the Ashland Daily Tidings” is for sale on Amazon and at Bloomsbury Books (bloomsburyashland.com; 290 East Main St., Ashland; 541-488-0029). I will also give a book reading there from 7 to 8 p.m. Thursday, May 19.

Dementia is now being called “brain failure,” a description similar to heart failure. This means it’s crucial to do your homework while you have some time to figure out the options. Someone recently said to me that his favorite quote is “No one plans to fail, rather they fail to plan.” My hope is that these new and upcoming resources will help you avoid that unnecessary outcome.