

October 23, 2020



Greetings,

On Tuesday, October 20 we completed our most recent round of COVID surveillance testing, unfortunately the results have not been posted at this point in time. This week in the newspaper we read an article about positive cases reported at the Federal Prison. Those 8 cases increased the county positivity rate, but we remain in the “minimal” level of transmission risk. DHHS has a phased reopening approach to nursing home based on county prevalence of active cases or facility on-set of COVID. Phase III requires 10 cases or fewer of COVID per 100,000 population and Phase II requires 50 cases or fewer per 100,000; due to the recent cases in Coos County we have been demoted to Phase II. We will not see changes in visiting between these two Phases, but group activities must be reduced in size, residents can leave for only medically necessary trips. We request that our community members maintain strict infectious control practices to help allow the nursing homes to maintain a status of Phase III, particularly as we enter cold and flu season.

At the beginning of COVID back in February and March we were hopeful that we would be back to “normal” at the end of the summer or at least during the holiday season, this is not proving to be the situation. We were unable to host our annual family BBQ, annual yard sale, Easter Dessert Buffet and the same will be true for our Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas events. This has been a long year with frequent changes, mandates and restrictions; we wish we were able to host our resident’s family members and share the joyous holiday season everyone but we must remain closed to open visitation and cancelling of annual gatherings during the holidays. The visitation schedule is booked daily, we will be organizing a team to discuss visitations and the best way to ensure all interested families have opportunities to spend time with their loved one.

We would also like to request you remind family members who will be visiting that only two (2) people may visit at one time, this is the same for compassionate care visits. We understand some families are large and this creates a difficult situation for some, but this is the mandate we have been presented until further notice.

Accompanied with today’s update is the first monthly Memory Care Letter from Kim Reardon, Memory Care Manager/Certified Dementia Practitioner/Certified Dementia Care Specialist.

If anyone has questions, concerns or comments please do not hesitate to call or email.

Thank you,

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The Stigma of Dementia: Acceptance and Overcoming

Dementia is a general term for changes in brain function that results in problems with memory, thought processes, and behavior. Dementia is often called the “Silent Epidemic”. This is due to the stigma that surrounds the disease. It is really the “Elephant in the room”. Many family members are scared to admit their loved one has dementia. Dementia is considered to be a highly stigmatized condition leading to significant negative effects that can be very dehumanizing to the health and well-being of people living with dementia especially if they lose the quality interactions and support of their friends and family. It can cause them feel insecure and lose confidence in themselves and their abilities. They may feel they are no longer in control and may not trust their own judgment.

Stigma is the use of negative labels to identify a person with a disability or illness. Stigma around dementia disease exists, in part, due to the lack of public awareness and understanding of the disease. We as a society often hear families say “my parent doesn’t have Dementia”, “There is nothing wrong with them,” or “They aren’t crazy.” The stigma or fear from families about the diagnosis is real and can be an obstacle their loved one.

Why is that? We usually don’t have a stigma or fear with other chronic diagnoses. Do we refuse to believe our medical professionals when there is a diagnosis of Diabetes, COPD, or even Cancer? More often than not no, we go through the stages of grief which may include denial but we as a society often get through it and we move on so we can start to care for the person who is affected with the disease. So, why not with Dementia?

The number one reason this is: Fear. Family members are afraid. They are often afraid of what others might say, they are afraid of losing their parent, afraid they won’t be the same person they once were, afraid of the embarrassment of what they might say or do and even fear of getting the disease themselves. Many family members believe if their loved one is diagnosed with dementia they are destined to be diagnosed with the disease. While family history increases the risk of a dementia diagnosis with some dementias, it is not true for all dementias.

So, how do we as a society fix this? Education, we need to raise awareness about the disease. Let loved ones, family members and friends know there is nothing wrong with a dementia diagnosis. Take away the embarrassment from the disease.

How do we overcome the stigma?

One way is to simply have more contact with those living with dementia. This allows others to see having a dementia diagnosis doesn’t make your loved one less of a person. Other ways involve learning about the disease, going to support groups or even have discussions with family and friends and educating them about the disease.

Here are some tips on how to do talk with others about the disease.

1. Be open and direct.

Engage others in discussions about dementia. What to expect from your loved one as the disease progresses.

2. Communicate the facts.

Sharing information is the key to change misconceptions about the disease.

3. Seek support and stay connected.

It is important to stay engaged in meaningful relationships and activities. Whether, it's family, friends or a support group.

4. Don't be discouraged.

Denial of the disease by others is not a reflection of you.

5. Be a part of the solution.

Yours is the most powerful voice to help raise awareness, end stigma, and advocate for more research.

Why do we need to do this?

The first and most important reason, your loved one will be much happier for it. Doing this will help them build self-esteem, confidence, independence. The sooner we accept our loved one's diagnosis, the sooner we get to become part of their reality. We need to be part of their reality because they cannot be part of ours. They will be happier and healthier and you can start making more memories. It may not be the memories you are used or that they will remember but they will memories that you will remember and it will last in their emotions. Even late in the disease they will still feel an emotional connection. Above all, it's important to remember that people living with dementia are still people. Dementia does not change that. What is always important to remember is that there are still lives to be lived, and people to love.

Another reason is education. Increasing education for dementia can lead to more funding which can lead to more research to better understand and hopefully one day a cure. Let's take the stigma out of dementia so one day we as a society we won't hear "my parent doesn't have Dementia", "There is nothing wrong with them," or "They aren't crazy" instead we will hear "my parent has dementia, and I support them in any way I can".

It's possible for your loved one to live well with dementia, and maintain their quality of life for as long as possible. You can help your loved one live well, too. As a family member of someone living with the dementia, you can help raise awareness, and end stigma of dementia.