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Dementia-Friendly Resources

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Editorials

From the Director, Virginia Center on Aging

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Dementia-Friendly Resources

Caring for someone with dementia can be exhausting and confusing. We sometimes feel alone, facing challenges we've never encountered before, and facing a person we've never seen before. Who is this man or woman behaving this way? Certainly not the mother or father or spouse I've known most of my life.

There are resources we can access without leaving home. There are like-minded groups intent on making communities more supportive. Here are two helpful resources.

Alzpossible.org is a primarily a workforce development website, dedicated to "person-centered ethical dementia care." But it is also a trove of resources that can help caregivers to cope. In its Mission statement, it speaks of leveraging resources already in place in Virginia. But healthcare professionals, direct care workers, and family caregivers almost anywhere can benefit from its many resources.

There are a number of new and older webinars posted on the site under sub-headings. These can offer an understanding of various matters, such as:

About Alzheimer's and Related Diseases (Parkinson's Disease Dementia; Dementia with Lewy Bodies; etc.);

Concrete challenges and solutions for professionals working with individuals with AD (Best practices for medication management; The use of technology to engage persons with dementia; Personality disorders and aging; etc.);

Role and influence of the family (Compassion fatigue; Caring for a spouse with Mild Cognitive Impairment; Family quality of life in dementia; etc.);

Person-centered principles (Cultural competence in dementia care; etc.);

Communication tools, challenges, opportunities (Strategies for communication and sensitivity; Environment & communication assessment toolkit for dementia care; etc.);

Caregiving recipes (Oral health and dementia; Respite; etc.);

Heart disease, stroke, nutrition, exercise (Heart disease and stroke prevention: Nutritional needs and the ABCs approach; etc.);

High Tech (High tech at home; etc.);

and a catch-all category called What you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask that includes such subjects as Compassion fatigue; Elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation; and Geriatric psychiatry.

Each webinar includes statements about the intended audience, webinar objectives, and the presenters. There are other helpful sections as well.

Dementia Friendly America (dfamerica.org) is a nationwide movement that began after the 2015 White House Conference on Aging aiming to ensure that communities are equipped to support people with dementia and their caregivers. It defines a dementia-friendly community as one "that is informed, safe and respectful of individuals with the disease, their families and caregivers and provides supportive options that foster quality of life."

The website includes the report *Better Together: A comparative analysis of age-friendly and dementia-friendly communities* (2016) that compares and contrasts these two movements. While there are some overlaps in values, age-friendly initiatives tend to be more generic, necessarily encompassing the great heterogeneity of the aging experience, while dementia-friendly initiatives focus on the specific sub-set of adults who have dementia conditions and their needs to be recognized.

A brief introductory video on the website expresses the hope that in a dementia-friendly community "people will walk toward people with dementia" to see how they might help.

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There are dozens of communities, from villages to metropolitan cities, that have joined this movement. Common to all is an emphasis on the social dimensions of dementia over the medical.

Alzheimer's Disease International states that dementia friendly communities, "not only seek to preserve the safety and wellbeing of those living with dementia, [but] also empower all members of the community to celebrate the capabilities of persons with dementia, and view them as valuable and vital members of the towns, cities, villages and countries in which they reside."

Dementia Friendly America identifies "Ten Sectors" where the above-mentioned aspirations need to be realized. These and their respective goals are:

- 1) Transportation, Housing and Public Spaces (Local Government). Infrastructure that makes communities more livable for people with dementia and their caregivers.
- 2) Businesses. Dementia-supportive customer service and environments and policies that support employee caregivers.
- 3) Legal and Advance Planning Services. Legal services that help vulnerable clients express their wishes early and avoid problems such as unpaid expenses.
- 4) Banks and Financial Services. Dementia friendly practices that help maintain clients' independence while protecting them from problems
- 5) Neighbors and Community Members. Raising awareness to help neighbors and community members understand and support people living with dementia.
- 6) Independent Living. Home-based services available to maximize independence and promote autonomy and a high quality of life.
- 7) Communities of Faith. Faith communities use dementia friendly practices to provide a welcoming, compassionate environment and spiritual connection.
- 8) Care Throughout the Continuum. Early diagnosis of dementia and ongoing medical care; patient education; and connecting patients and their caregivers with community resources that promote quality of life.
- 9) Memory Loss Supports and Services. A spectrum of settings and services needed by people with dementia, from long term care facilities and assisted

and independent living residences, to home care, adult day services, and hospice.

10) Emergency Planning and First Response. Community planning and family preparation considers safety, security, and needs of people with dementia in disaster planning and emergency response

Dementia Friendly America lists hundreds of resources that can help any community to become more dementia-friendly. These can be accessed by clicking any of the 27 subject areas, such as Arts and Cultural Activities, Clinical Tools, Local Government, Memory Cafes, and Youth and Education/University Partners.

While caregiving challenges continue for individual caregivers and communities, these two resources can offer immediate support and a hopeful vision.