

Hope for families who care for those with Alzheimer's disease

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC
Founder and Executive Director of Eldercare Services

The importance of November has expanded beyond giving thanks and eating turkey for millions of Americans this year. As the larger generations prepare to retire and dementia is on the rise, new family dynamics and challenges are emerging. The month of November highlights these issues with National Family Caregivers Month and with National Memory Screening Day.

Over 5 million people in the United States are affected by Alzheimer's Dementia. According to studies by the Family Caregiver Alliance in San Francisco, over *80%* of these individuals are being cared for by family members. And, of those caregivers who are spouses and the primary caregiver, *50%* of them suffer with clinical depression.

Caregiving provided to a loved one with a dementia, such as Alzheimer's Disease, can be stressful and exhausting or it can become a time of pulling together by a family in order to share the care and the special love that comes from being able to value the time together. "It can be a time of closeness generated from the heart and soul once families learn new ways of communicating and just being in the moment. Cognitive two-way communication is often not possible as dementia advances, but the ability to communicate with the essence of the person or spirit remains for a long time during this journey" says, Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MFT, CMC, and Executive Director of Eldercare Services in Walnut Creek, CA.

Fodrini-Johnson says, that most family members, who find themselves in the primary care role for someone with a memory loss disorder, need education and tools to help with the behavioral changes they will be experiencing as their family member progresses in the disease process. Without a natural ability to do the "dance" of dementia, caregivers can become easily frustrated and in turn frustrate and sometimes anger the individual with a dementia. Eldercare Services, located in the San Francisco Bay Area, provides

five different classes to help family members obtain the survival skills they will need for this long process.

Eldercare Services (www.EldercareAnswers.com) not only focuses on the education component of understanding the different dementias and how they are diagnosed and treated, but also on re-training the family members on how to avoid behavior problems, how to communicate effectively with someone who has a dementia and how to receive self-care. All of their classes are free to the community.

Jim Swanson, a family member who took three of the classes, said, "It took me a while to get the instruction/message of not rationalizing with my mother. But, after the third class I got it and my entire relationship with my mother has shifted and is now much more positive." Not rationalizing is one of Eldercare Services "Do's & Don'ts of Communication with someone with a Dementia." Once family members convert the instruction into practice, they can have peaceful relationships and learn to just enjoy the moment. Encompassing the entire family, it takes practice, support and the ability to self-care to traverse the dementia journey.

Tuesday, November 18th is National Memory Screening Day. At both the San Francisco and Walnut Creek offices, Eldercare Services will be providing free memory screenings organized by The National Alzheimer's Foundation. For more information contact Eldercare Services or The National Alzheimer's Foundation.

Eldercare Services is a pioneer in a unique delivery of services, providing counseling, geriatric care management, family support groups, classes and direct caregiving. Eldercare Services has offices in Walnut Creek, Marin and San Francisco, California. For further information regarding their services, please call: (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or (866) 760-1808. You may also visit them on the web at: www.EldercareAnswers.com