

Love them where they are

Some say true love only happens in fairy tales, but the staff of the Edith Brown Pavilion at Highland District Hospital begs to differ. They deal with love stories every day as they care for their patients with Alzheimer's disease (AD) and interact with patients' family members who are holding onto the fading memories of their loved ones.

"Watching a family member learn to live in the moment of an AD patient's reality is a truly remarkable experience," says Ramesh K. Shivani, M.D., Psychiatrist at the hospital's Edith Brown Pavilion.

When a granddaughter listens to her grandmother's lingering memories—a remembered dance, a familiar song, a style of dress—her thoughts may not have clear continuity, but it is still a special time. Wishing you could hold onto the person from the past is just a heartache. You have to accept them where they are, as tough as that may be. But if you can let go of the "shoulds" and "why nots" and live in the moment with them, you truly create a new memory for yourself.

Coping with the diagnosis. "When a patient is first diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease it sends out a series of shock waves in families," says Dr. Shivani. "Once they have taken steps to accept the diagnosis, they generally want to learn how to help their loved one as well as learn how to cope with the impact it will have on their own lives. It is important to not let this new situation bring quarrels and strife. Work together to create solutions and ask your healthcare provider for advice." Some steps recommended by the Edith Brown Pavilion staff to minimize conflict include:

- Divide up responsibilities, play to each person's strengths.
- Meet regularly face to face or on conference calls.
- Be open with your feelings and accept suggestions.
- Don't criticize.

Giving and getting support. “Just as we are unique individuals while healthy, AD patients are certainly unique and will respond differently as the disease progresses,” says Dr. Shivani. “Being aware of that and seeking advice is important for the family members who will be playing the role of caregiver. Even though your loved one’s life has taken an undesirable turn, try to enjoy your time together. It is a balancing act to help them and still preserve their privacy and dignity.

“As a caregiver you probably know that person best,” says Dr. Shivani. “You know what will agitate or upset them. You know what time of day is their best time to handle extra stimulation. Resist putting your loved one in difficult situations. You can’t control the progression of Alzheimer’s or their distress, but you can set boundaries with visitors and avoid needless stress. Most importantly, give your loved one unconditional reassurance. Be there in the present moment with them.

“Learning to ask for help and taking breaks whenever possible is equally vital for the caregiver and ultimately the patient,” adds Dr. Shivani. He suggests:

- Pick your priorities: You can’t do it all.
- Simplify: Put fewer burdens on yourself.
- Delegate: Accept assistance with cleaning, shopping or meal preparation.
- Just do the best you can: Love them where they are.

Confidential assessment. Most behavioral and emotional problems of senior adults can be treated. Early detection, diagnosis and treatment are important. Some of the symptoms to look for are: forgetting names, misplacing things, getting lost, prolonged depression; marked personality changes; numerous, unexplained physical ailments; changes in eating or sleeping patterns; confusion or inability to concentrate; excessive fears and anxiety; withdrawal from family and friends; and being fearful or paranoid.

The inpatient services of Edith Brown Pavilion are designed to diagnose and treat the complex behavioral and emotional problems of older adults. A treatment team of medical and clinical professionals is assigned to each patient and they inform and assist family members with the coping process. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call the Edith Brown Pavilion at 937.840.6581