

PVMCI

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative | Winter 2023

QUARTERLY

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To many, winter can mean shorter days, longer nights, gloomy weather and drab surroundings. Growing up in Syracuse, NY, with frequent snow and rare sunny days, we learned from our parents about the importance of finding small moments of joy and beauty to help sustain us. These moments were varied and could include watching and trying to identify a bird at the bird feeder, dancing to favorite music while cleaning up after dinner, looking at ice crystals on the window, and eating a juicy, sweet orange at the peak of ripeness.

My folks always had cameras at the ready (and still do—despite their smart phones!) and would stop to catch whatever caught their eye—from the way the light lit up a nearby stream or a smile that lit up someone's face. One day, after a really bad ice storm, my father was driving in the country and came upon a barn with a backdrop of trees that were coated with ice and looked like they were made from crystals. He went back and brought my mom to share the sight and she captured this photo.

This is our first winter PVMCI Quarterly and our amazing team has again put together a great issue. Speaking of teams, Karen Romanowski writes about

the importance of building your own team, and discusses how to get past barriers by asking yourself questions like, "Can I give a gift to others by letting them help." She has provided resources to make team building easier. Sharon Asher writes about improv and how its techniques fit in so well with dementia caregiving. Anne Bastings has done inspiring work around this and, if interested, I recommend checking out her website. Deb Peavey has included tips on how to get more light during our shorter winter days. Studies have shown how important this is for our physical and mental health. I am a big proponent of getting outside, dressed

appropriately of course, even for a short period of time. If weather prohibits this, a light box with 10,000 lux of light used in the morning for a short period of time can provide some of the same benefits. Christine Grimaldi has compiled a great list of winter activities. I hope these can help you find your own moments of joy.



Photo credit: Helene Starr

Best to all,

Rebecca Starr, MD, Medical Director,
Geriatrics and PVMCI,
MGH Cooley Dickinson Healthcare



It Takes a Team

~Karen Romanowski, RN, Memory Care Specialist

When I was a young, new nurse, I was surprised to learn something that I was perhaps lucky or oblivious not to have noticed previously: all of us will age, have to work with diminishing capacities, have to learn new skills with fewer resources, have to exercise new muscles and have to be flexible to navigate aging, accidents and illness. While I am aware none of us can predict how we will react with any set of circumstances, I have witnessed one consistent factor that supports resilience and has helped me through my own health issues and when assisting a family member with care. Building a team works! These are the questions I ask myself and ideas to help develop and support your teams.

Who is currently on my team? Is the team too small – if someone on the starting lineup can't play, is there a replacement?

Who has ever asked me, "Is there anything I can do to help?" Invite them on the team!

Can I practice saying "YES!" whenever anyone asks if they can help? Develop a list of specific tasks and support you would benefit from. Example: companionship mid-day, a meal delivery, a joke a day, a phone call, etc.

What tasks are consistently left undone? Who on the team can help with them?

Can I give a gift to others by letting them help?

Who played on a team with me in the past? Reach out to them!

If no one comes to mind, what other resources are available to create a team?

Are there things I can do to encourage teamwork? Create a communication notebook for team members, create an online calendar, create a text thread with team members?

Can I accept someone providing care in a style that is different than mine? Can I embrace that anyone who wants to help has their own special skills and let them shine in their own special way and be the star player for the day?

If I am a caregiver, am I adding my own needs to

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."

~Maya Angelou



the list of support I accept?

If you are having trouble answering some of these questions, consider asking a friend or family member to help you answer the questions with what they see through their eyes.

If you find technology helpful, there are many online resources that can aid communication, scheduling and delegation of tasks for caregivers:

www.lotsahelpinghands.com

www.caringbridge.org, www.caringvillage.com

www.ianacare.com

Lastly, PVMCI Memory Care Specialists can help you answer with questions and assist in identifying resources. It is our hope that we will be strong players that help to support you. ❖

Have You Ever been to an Improv Show?

~Sharon Asher, RN, BSN, MBA, PROGRAM MANAGER

I remember going to a large nursing conference years ago where they brought in a comedy improv team for an entertainment event. Just prior to the event, we had a talk about the side effects of marijuana including males producing two-headed sperm.

The entertainment event then began, and the improv comedians took the stage and explained how improv comedy works. Basically, everyone just goes along with what the others say. The comedians yelled out to the group of about 500 nurses and asked for a topic to start things off. A nurse yelled out “You have two headed sperm.” The comedians chuckled as did the audience and then away they went with their skit about two-headed sperm.

Why am I telling you about this? Well, there is something to be learned about the “just going along” improv technique in dementia care. It is a mindset that answers “yes and” to whatever comes about. Someone with dementia states that they dated someone in the Beatles, your reply could be “How wonderful, how was that”? My stepmom would say that she cooked dinner and cleaned the house when she could no longer do that. The best reply was always “You did a great job”.

Some people use the improv technique as a fun way to get some exercise. One person gives a movement instruction, and you continue that until someone gives another one. For example, one person says “Walk,” so you walk in place. The next

person says “Pretend that you are dancing the twist,” then you begin doing that.

Others have used the idea for storytelling. Anne Bastings in creating her work called *Time Slips*, uses the improv idea for creative story telling. The general idea is that you look at a generic picture



together and then take turns making up a fictional story about it. You write down the ideas as you go and then at the end someone tells the whole story. These photos are



from Anne’s website. I have used these two photos many times with people living with dementia and we have told some wonderful stories about them.

Interested in learning more? Check out these websites:

[Creativity Center – TimeSlips Creative Storytelling](#)
[Anne Basting \(anne-basting.com\)](#)

[How Improvisational Techniques Help Engage Dementia Patients \(brainandlife.org\)](#)

[How Dementia Caregivers Can Benefit from Improvisational Theater - Senior Housing News](#)

Let There be Light

Good lighting and dementia-friendly environments

In this season of shorter days, it can be helpful to surround ourselves with good lighting. The following information is borrowed from the Social Care Institute for Excellence, SCIE, a UK charity organization.

People with dementia need to see their environment to help make sense of it and to make the most of their remaining abilities. Effective lighting can help people with dementia see where they want to go and to identify spaces, rooms, equipment and signs. It helps them to see other people's faces and body language, to enjoy recreational activities, to join in everyday routines, and to enjoy the changing seasons.

Poor lighting will substantially reduce a person's ability to do all these things. It can also contribute to accidents—particularly falls—and cause unnecessary stress (for example, being frightened by misinterpreting shadows).

Ageing and impaired vision

Ageing eyes need twice as much light as young eyes—and people with dementia need even more. For older people, contrast is reduced and some colors are hard to see. Good lighting and design can make the difference between seeing and not seeing for older people with impaired vision, and between comfort and discomfort. A person with dementia has difficulty making sense of or recognizing what they see—if they can't see things physically as well, it is twice as hard for them as anyone else.

What is effective lighting?

Effective lighting involves a combination of

increased light levels, good contrast, minimizing glare, avoiding sudden changes in light levels and good color definition. Quality lighting is a vital component of good dementia-friendly design.

Valuing daylight

Daylight should be used wherever possible because it delivers good color interpretation—and it's free. It is important to make the most of windows and doors that bring in light. Doing simple things such as cleaning windows regularly, opening blinds and moving furniture that is blocking natural light can make a difference.

Being out in daylight is very important for improving mood and body rhythms, increasing vitamin D levels and promoting sleep at night. Balconies and court yards can be valuable spaces for this.

Managing light sources

You can manage sunlight with blinds, curtains and external shading devices. Use a range of artificial lights to reduce glare: main, centrally positioned lights, wall-mounted lights and freestanding lamps. Cover surfaces to reduce glare or high reflection. Having more light fittings is better than fewer brighter ones. Indirect lighting via the ceiling is good and local lighting should be adjustable and movable as needed.

Warning about low-energy lights

Be careful about where you use low-energy lights—they take a long time to get up to the right light level. This makes them dangerous to use in stairwells as the person may switch on the light and start to climb up or down before the light is bright enough to see. You also need to change the bulbs frequently, even if they are still working, because over time they give out less and less light. ❖



In the Spotlight

Staff Member Name: Sharon Asher

Current Role at PVMCI: Program Manager

Your professional background:

I have been a nurse for 38 years. I worked for almost 20 years in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Baystate Medical Center. I then moved into ambulatory care and management. I was the manager when Dr. Starr joined Cooley Dickinson Medical Group. At the same time, my stepmother had progressing Alzheimer's Dementia which our family was struggling with. Dr. Starr helped my family immensely and that planted the seed that I wanted to work to help people living with memory loss and their caregivers. I was fortunate to be able to move into the nurse supporting job and work with Dr. Starr for three years which I enjoyed immensely. Our program manager for PVMCI retired in October of 2020 and I was blessed to be able to move into this role as program manager.

What drew you to work with older adults with memory loss?

Being a caregiver myself and seeing how much it

affected our family. We didn't know where to go for help.

What is your educational background?

I graduated from Baystate Medical Center School of Nursing, long since closed. I have a Bachelor of Nursing Degree from UMass Amherst and a Master of Business Administration Degree with a focus in Healthcare Administration from Elms College. I am also a Certified Geriatric Nurse.



What do you love about your job?

I love being the program manager for PVMCI as it lets me be creative in thinking about what families need and then working to make that happen. I enjoy working with our wonderful and creative staff and it is an honor to be able to work with Dr. Rebecca Starr and now Dr. Jani.

Do you have any hobbies?

I have many hobbies that I enjoy including playing various musical instruments, traveling, reading, writing, spending time in New Hampshire and hanging out with my family and dogs. My most recent hobby is spending time with my new granddaughter.

Other information that you would like to share?

I grew up in Northampton and have been a lifelong resident of the area. I am so glad that I can work in the community that I know so well. ❖

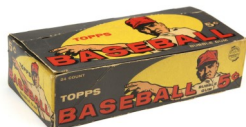
WINTER ACTIVITY IDEAS



Create Favorite Dishes Together

Choose a simple, easy-to-prepare recipe that you know your relative or friend with dementia enjoys and prepare it with them. During the wintertime, holiday dishes, including those passed down through generations, can rekindle sweet memories.

Organize Collections and Household Areas



Some people with dementia gain a sense of peace and calm when they organize items. To make this even more rewarding, consider organizing items that will bring up positive memories. Maybe those baseball cards that are your grandfather's from when he was a child, or those recipe cards that were handwritten by your mother. If the activity is too challenging, break it down into small steps.

Watch Family Videos

Watching family videos can spark memories and stimulate positive thoughts. Try not to ask, "Do you remember" too many times so as not to cause frustration. Even if your relative or friend doesn't remember, you can share videos of people from their life, helping them feel as though they're learning about someone important to them.

Start a Painting (or other hobby)



For many people, doing something in a seated position is more comfortable than being active for long periods of time. Arts and crafts like painting encourage creativity and self-expression without being physically demanding and paint-by-numbers can help simplify the activity. If your family member or friend has a good amount of control over his or her fine motor skills, you could even consider crafts like pottery.

Work on Puzzles Together

Jigsaw puzzles can be especially beneficial for individuals with dementia because they come in various skill levels and can be completed over time, reducing stress. For those in the later stages of dementia, use puzzles with fewer, larger pieces and a simple design. Work on them together during the course of a day, week, or month. Making a personalized picture puzzle may help connect the person with dementia to the activity.

Try Some Trivia

Though memories can fade, many people retain a significant amount of knowledge despite their dementia. If a person enjoyed similar activities and topics prior to the onset of their condition, they might do well with trivia. Playing with a group of people can take the pressure off.

Play Cards or a Favorite Board Game



Board games can be a fun group experience. When playing with someone who has dementia, it is essential to choose the right type of game. Games that require a strong skill set, such as the use of math, may be too challenging. Chess, checkers and other favorites often strike the right balance between ease and strategy. Games will be more enjoyable for people experiencing memory loss when they have played the game previously and remember some of the key tactics used in them. Familiar games like Go Fish can be fun and nostalgic.

Play Bingo

Bingo is a lot of fun! It's familiar, comforting and great for both adults and children. Plan an evening with a group of people and keep it lighthearted. Increase the interest by offering a fun prize. (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Incorporate Computer Games

Playing computer games can be a great winter pastime. Choose one or two games to learn and play them together. This can also be a good activity for those who like to spend time alone.



Do Chair Exercises or Yoga

Use a chair as a base to do simple exercises, including repetitive movement of the arms or legs to get the blood flowing. Chair exercises should be stimulating and energizing, but not push a person to the point of exhaustion. With yoga, poses can be modified by ability.

Go for a Walk or Head to the Fitness Center

Is there a paved area in a local park or another accessible, attractive outdoor area nearby? The bike path is usually plowed in the winter. Or avoid the cold and walk around an indoor shopping area. Areas with large windows can provide great views of outdoor scenery without the cold. The senior center or YMCA often offer activities like swimming, walking, biking, and fitness classes for adults with different levels of mobility.



Garden Indoors

Winter may limit gardening, but it doesn't have to stop it altogether. Create an indoor garden with a number of smaller, easier-to-manage plants. Place them in a sunny, accessible area to encourage tending. For those in the later stages of dementia, choose plants that don't require much care, such as succulents.

Give Back

Sometimes the best thing you can do is something nice for someone else. For example, if your relative or friend with dementia enjoys knitting, you can knit hats together for cancer patients or newborns.

Video Chat with Family and Friends

Combat feelings of isolation or loneliness by taking

the time to reach out to friends and family who may live far away. Many free apps like Skype, Facetime (on Apple devices), Google Meet, Zoom's free option, Facebook Messenger, or WhatsApp make it easy. Set up regular video chat dates during times of the day when your older adult is most awake and alert.

Sip Hot Drinks



Warm up on a cold day than a cup of hot chocolate or tea! With so many varieties to sample, your loved one can have their sense of smell and taste stimulated.

Spend a Morning or Afternoon Birdwatching

If your loved one is unable to birdwatch outdoors, you can bring the birds to them. Set up a feeder outside and help your loved one identify and keep track of the birds they see. Look at bird books to identify species.



Play Their Favorite Nostalgic Music

Talk to your loved one to learn about their favorite music and bring over a mix CD or stream live from providers such as Pandora, iTunes or Spotify. Use familiar tunes as a starting point for a conversation about memorable events. You could even combine it with another activity like working on a puzzle while the blizzard roars outside. Or get up and dance!

Arrange Flowers

Arranging flowers is creative yet calming and can provide the opportunity to use imagination and practice precise hand movements. The results will fill the home with color and fresh, floral scents, brightening the space and reminding us that spring is right around the corner. ❖

Resources:

<https://thebrielle.com/15-winter-activities-for-seniors-with-dementia/>

<https://dailyaring.com/5-winter-activities-for-seniors-that-warm-the-heart/>

<https://www.alert-1.com/blog/general/7-dementia-friendly-winter-activities-for-seniors/5112>



Northampton Memory Cafe

Presented by Northampton Senior Center, Northampton Neighbors,
Pioneer Valley Memory Care Initiative & Highland Valley Elder Services

WHERE: Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz Street, Northampton MA.

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of each month from 1:00-2:30pm. A fun activity, a light snack, coffee, tea or beverage will be offered.

RSVP REQUIRED: Please call the Northampton Senior Center at 413-587-1228 to register. Space is limited so please RSVP early to assure a space!

ABOUT MEMORY CAFES: Memory Cafes are social get-togethers for people living with memory loss or dementia and their care partners. The meetings offer a fun activity as well as time for caregivers to share experiences and connect with other care partners. Care partners are strongly encouraged to stay for the duration of the meeting.

Funded in part by a grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation.

PIONEER VALLEY MEMORY CARE INITIATIVE

The PVMCI is a coalition of health care and community providers dedicated to empowering and supporting older adults living with dementia and their family caregivers to improve their quality of life. Partnering organizations include Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Cooley Dickinson Medical Group, Cooley Dickinson VNA & Hospice, Valley Medical Group, the Alzheimer's Association, Highland Valley Elder Services, and local Village Networks, senior services, and Councils on Aging. The PVMCI is a member of the Massachusetts General Hospital Memory Care Initiative.

Based out of the Cooley Dickinson Geriatrics program and led by Rebecca Starr, MD, Medical Director, Geriatrician, the PVMCI serves older adults living with memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's disease and their family caregivers who reside in Amherst, Easthampton and Northampton (including Florence & Leeds). We would be happy to discuss this program and answer any questions that you and/or your loved one may have! Call **413-582-2357** and leave a message with your contact information—someone from PVMCI will return your call.

This program is funded by The Eisenberg Family Trust and made possible in part by a grant from Highland Valley Elder Services (HVES) through funding under the Federal Older Americans Act. To meet our federal requirements, we have been requested to advise you that "there is no fee for the service; however, a voluntary confidential donation is requested. You will not be refused service for lack of a donation. Your donation helps support the continuation of needed services for elders." Interested in donating? Please call the Cooley Dickinson development office at **413-582-2256**. *Thank you!*