

# BAI BEACON

*The Newsletter from Family and Community Services  
Made possible by generous donations to Banner Alzheimer's Foundation*

www.banneralz.org • 602.839.6900 • December 2015 • Volume 8, Number 12

## ***The Gift of Presence***

As we approach the holiday season, a time of gift-giving, it seems appropriate to reflect on the best offering we can give to those we love who have dementia – *the gift of presence*. Presence is typically defined as “the state or fact of existing, occurring or being present in a place or thing.” However, an alternative definition of “the ability to project a sense of ease, poise or self-assurance, especially the quality or manner of a person’s bearing before an audience” speaks directly to the needs for calmness, reassurance and comfort in those who are confused. Equally, it reminds caregivers, family or friends of the great gifts they offer in “being present” with, and for their loved one, who is their audience. It is no simple statement that the best present for the person with dementia is *presence!*

Presence in its purest form requires that we live in the moment, the here and now, not constantly planning ahead or looking back in the past. But this can be hard to do on a day to day basis since our lives require both at times. If there is a gift that comes from dementia, especially as the person loses the concept of time, it is that of living for the immediate moment, and of that being sufficient, with no judgment entailed. We as family struggle, however, to keep our loved ones on our time schedule, and to continue to function in our world, often creating frustration for ourselves and for them. We have a hard time letting go of what was, of what might have been,



and accepting the new realities as our person changes. We often find ourselves remorseful, and focusing more on what is missing, rather than what is present in our lives. Author Freena Gray-Davidson offers a line in her Alzheimer's Caregiver's Prayer: “Help me to journey to the place where it's enough to be the people we both are.” Mandy Hale offers her words: “You don't always need a plan. Sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go, and see what happens.” How profound their words are!

How do we learn to live in the present, and what does that actually mean? It is to live artfully and well, doing

## ***Our Mission***

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.



## Ask The Expert

Helle Brand, PA  
Physician Assistant, Stead Family Memory Center

Dear Helle:

*My mom has advanced dementia and is now residing in a memory care facility. I don't think she knows who I am anymore and visits have become very hard for me and my family. We don't know what to say to her or how to engage her in a meaningful way. I often walk away from the visits and wonder if it even matters if we visit any longer. But, then I feel awful for feeling that way because she was always there for me. As the holidays approach, it makes it even more difficult as so many memories include my mom who is here physically but isn't present in other ways. What can I do to make visits better or should I simply step back and let time take its course?*

*Signed,  
Lisa*

Dear Lisa:

As people with dementia enter into the late moderate to advanced stages of dementia, there are not only significant losses of memory and language skills but also visual perceptual abilities making it more difficult to interpret what is being seen. People will spend more time sleeping throughout the day because it takes so much effort to be present during waking hours. However, the person still “is” and there are opportunities for continued connection right until the end of life.

While your mom may have a disease that has limited her brain and body, her spirit is alive and well. Now is a time to make connections that have deep rooted meaning and understanding and transcend the need for conversation. Most of us have practiced this art of “being” as we nurture young infants and children without words, comfort family and friends with a hug, a smile, or pat on the shoulder; or simply take in beautiful moments.

Your visits do matter but you will have to change the way in which you have long communicated. Learn from the staff the best time to visit your mom – when she is awake and not fatigued following meals, daily care, or activities. Your visits will also be shorter as your mom will fatigue more quickly. Thirty minutes to an hour may be enough. Don't spend time asking your mom, “Do you know who I am.” Tell her; “Hi Mom, it's Lisa.” Keep your conversations brief and upbeat and begin to infuse sensory experiences. Since the pleasure of food continues, bring in a favorite treat that is soft and sweet and can be chewed and swallowed easily. Since it's the holidays, think about a favorite cookie or candy that she has long enjoyed. Provide your mom a gentle hand massage using scented lotion. Reminisce about favorite memories and even show her a couple of pictures as you tell her about the fun being had in those moments - that means you don't ask her questions about the “who, what or where” of the photographs. Sing to her and she may just join along. The holidays are packed with many familiar songs. Try a couple of rounds of “Jingle Bells,” “Silent Night,” or “You are My Sunshine” and you are likely to see a smile on her face or in her eyes!

Nurture your mom's spirit. This can be done by revisiting familiar spiritual practices of saying well-rehearsed prayers or reading short passages of scriptures or poems. Ask a chaplain to give her communion if that has been a past practice. Provide tactile experiences through placing a well-worn Bible in her hands, rosary beads, or prayer shawl. When the weather permits, get her outside for brief moments of fresh air and sunlight. Finally, fill her with love and praise for all she has done for you. The beauty of your words, voice tone and facial expression will make complete sense to her spirit.

As you learn what works, share it with other family members or friends who wish to stay connected to your mom until the end. Remember, your visits matter because your mom matters. Your gift of presence as you connect with her spirit will be the best gift of all this holiday season.

## December 2015 Program Schedule CAREGIVER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### PHOENIX

#### **Problem Behaviors: Solutions that Work**

Learn about the most common types of behavior problems in dementia and a variety of solutions to minimize them.

*Wednesday, December 2; 10:00 a.m. - noon*  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 839-6850

#### **COMPASS: Directions for Caregivers after the Dementia Diagnosis**

Learn the basics of Alzheimer's disease/related dementia and how to implement 8 practical strategies to avoid many of the common problems that arise.

*Monday, December 7; 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.*  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 839-6850

#### **Planning Ahead Class for Caregivers**

Learn how to plan for legal, financial and medical decisions for someone with Alzheimer's disease/related dementia.

*Tuesday, December 8; 10:00 a.m. - noon*  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 839-6850



### PHOENIX (CON'T)

#### **Banner Brain Health Program**

Learn how lifestyle choices can minimize the risk of Alzheimer's disease and then "flex" your cognitive muscles as you determine how to exercise your brain.

*Wednesday, December 9; 1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.*  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 230-CARE (2273)

#### **Caregiver FOCUS: Yoga**

*Thursday, December 17; 12:30-2 p.m.*  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 839-6850

### MESA

#### **Preparing for the Holiday Season**

Learn how to navigate through the holiday season and a variety of ways to help minimize stress and maximize success for the person with dementia and family alike.

*Tuesday, December 15; 10:00 a.m. - noon*  
Mesa Red Mountain Library  
635 N. Power Road, Mesa  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (602) 839-6850

*Please turn over for more classes →*

**These programs are made possible  
by the generous support of the  
Banner Alzheimer's Foundation.**

## December 2015 Program Schedule CAREGIVER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### SUN CITY

#### **Banner Brain Health Program**

Learn how lifestyle choices can minimize the risk of Alzheimer's disease and then "flex" your cognitive muscles as you determine how to exercise your brain.

*Tuesday, December 8, 2015; 2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Banner Sun Health Research Institute  
10515 W. Santa Fe Drive, Sun City  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call 602-230-CARE (2273)*

#### **BSHRI Community Lecture Series**

##### Holidays & Grief

The holiday season is quickly approaching and for many people that signifies joy. For others who may be caregiving for someone with Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease or struggling with the recent loss of a loved one; feelings of grief may surface during this time. This lecture will explore the emotions that may surface, how to better manage them and offer strategies to enhance self-care during this time.

*Wednesday, December 9, 2015; 2:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.  
Banner Sun Health Research Institute  
10515 W. Santa Fe Drive, Sun City  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (623) 832-3248*

#### **To learn about upcoming education and support programs dates at:**

- Banner Alzheimer's Institute, visit [www.banneralz.org](http://www.banneralz.org) and click on "Events Calendar" icon or call Deidra Colvin, Events Coordinator at 602-839-6850
- Banner Sun Health Research Institute, visit [www.bannershri.org](http://www.bannershri.org) and click on "Events and Education" or call Veronica Flores, Events Coordinator at 623-832-3248

### SURPRISE

#### **COMPASS: Directions for Caregivers after the Dementia Diagnosis**

Learn the basics of Alzheimer's disease/related dementia and how to implement 8 practical strategies to avoid many of the common problems that arise.

*Tuesday, December 1, 2015; 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.  
Benevilla  
16752 N. Greasewood Street, Surprise, AZ  
Free but registration is required.  
To register, call (623)832-3248*

### WEBINAR/TELECONFERENCE

#### **Dementia Dialogues Webinar Series**

##### The Gift of Presence

As we attend to our person's physical safety and well-being, what can become lost is the personal connection we had with them- the unique ties in our relationship. Join this Dialogue to be reminded of the beauty of your relationship and learn how the greatest gift you can give your loved one is your presence.

*Wednesdays, December 16; noon-1:00 p.m. Arizona Time. Register online at [www.banneralz.org/dementialogues](http://www.banneralz.org/dementialogues) or by calling 623.832.3248*

