

# *LEARNING IT'S ALZHEIMER'S... WHERE CAN YOU TURN?*

By Roberta L. Wertenberg, Coordinator, 5th District, Adult Protective Services, C.A.R.E. Program

You have been to your physician, and he has diagnosed Alzheimer's Disease, the most common type of dementia. Perhaps one of four medications has been prescribed in treatment. Your physician has addressed the physical manifestations of the illness, but has left you without an understanding of what comes next. Where can you turn to find information, resources, and support?

Start by learning about the disease. Alzheimer's disease was first described by Dr. Alois Alzheimer in 1906. He documented the case of a middle-aged woman whose symptoms began with memory loss and disorientation. Today, we know that Alzheimer's is a progressive, degenerative disease that attacks the brain and results in impaired memory, behavior, and safety judgment. The disease typically runs from two to ten years, but with early diagnosis, caregivers may be faced with an even longer challenge.

Agitation, passivity, and social isolation may mark the early stage of the disease process. Mid-stage challenges can include incontinence, paranoia, and resistance to bathing. During the last stage, twenty-four hour care is required.

While currently there is no known cure for Alzheimer's Disease, families of Alzheimer's sufferers can take steps to lessen the impact on the care giver. For example, when wandering becomes an issue, it is advisable to register your loved one with the Alzheimer's Safe Return Program in your area. Many Alzheimer's victims benefit from participating in an adult day care program. Following the Alzheimer's-related death of a loved one, some families elect autopsy or organ donation. Check with your local Alzheimer's Association chapter office to inquire about these services.

The Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association has been providing support to families and patients with memory loss since 1980. A good place to start, the Association offers a wealth of educational materials and programs. To receive free educational materials and determine which services are available in your area, call 1-800-272-3900.

The State of California is privileged to have The Inland Caregiver Resource Center; with their mission to assist the caregivers of brain impaired adults. Services provided include family consultation, legal assistance, support group referral and caregiver retreats. Dial toll-free (800) 675-6694 or (909) 387-9440 for the Inland counties office.

With research leading us toward earlier diagnosis, Alzheimer's patients can often participate in important decisions regarding their healthcare and finances. If your loved one resides in a facility, contact your local Ombudsman, who is empowered to assist you with the execution of that document. If your loved one lives at home, this document may be incorporated into a Living Will or Trust. Your

family attorney will be able to advise you in matters related to legal capacity. Review important documents such as insurance and burial policies, beneficiary statements, mortgage papers, and social security and veteran's benefits to identify resources that can be put in place when needed. Work with your bank, which may offer services that will help you manage your accounts via services such as automatic payment, direct deposit, or checking with multiple signatories. And don't forget to check on your tax status, as many states offer caregiver deductions or credits.

Primary coverage for most people aged sixty-five and older is Medicare. To determine your benefits under Medicare or a health maintenance organization (HMO), contact your provider. You may also check with your state insurance commission office, or the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-273-4227. Be sure to ask whether your policy covers Alzheimer's disease, and if it offers a respite benefit.

As the caregiver of a person with memory loss, you journey through the stages of this disease along with your loved one. Partnering with family, friends, and service agencies can enrich your experience, and give you the support that you must find to provide care from the heart.

### CAREGIVER RESOURCES

Alzheimer's Association-Telephone programs 1-800-272-3900

Area Agency on Aging-Telephone, programs, respite info 1-800-510-2020

Family Caregiver Alliance-1-800-445-8106 [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

Inland Caregiver Resource Center-Consultation, support groups, caregiver retreats 1-800-675-6694

### FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Department of Veterans Affairs 1-800-733-8387

Internal Revenue Service 1-800-829-1040 or [www.irs.ustreas.gov](http://www.irs.ustreas.gov)

Social Security Administration 1-800-722-1213 or [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

© 2005, Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities. All rights reserved. This article may not be reproduced in any manner without permission.

*Meeting the Challenges* is published quarterly (four times a year) by the Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities, 6296 Rivercrest Drive, Suite K, Riverside, CA, 92507. The Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation organized for the purpose of improving or preserving the independence and dignity of the elderly and persons with disabilities and their families. **The educational programs of the Partnership to Preserve Independent Living for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities are supported by grants and the charitable contributions of individuals and organizations.** Visit us on the Internet at [www.LivingPartnership.org](http://www.LivingPartnership.org) or through *Vital Connections* at [www.vitalco.net](http://www.vitalco.net).