

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 • February 2015 • Volume 8, Number 2

Lack of Awareness vs. Denial in Dementia

A common problem we encounter in a new diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease/related dementia is well-meaning family members wanting assistance to help the person with memory loss accept and understand that s/he has a dementia diagnosis. While this might sound like a rational task, we know that in most cases, the person with the memory disorder is simply not aware of their own cognitive changes and limitations. The notion that we can bring logic or convince the person to believe something they lack an understanding about is unrealistic at best, and can lead to great deal of conflict and resistance between the person and family.

"Anosognosia" is the term that describes the lack of self-awareness, a condition in which a person who suffers from a disability seems unaware of the existence of his or her disease. From a practical standpoint, we contend that the lack of awareness that we perceive in persons with dementia is quite different than an actual denial which describes a psychological defense mechanism when an individual refuses to accept their illness.

So why can't a person with dementia see what is so apparent to those around them? We must understand that the frontal lobes in the brain that help us organize information fail in dementia. In fact, this is a core feature in the neurobiology of Alzheimer's and other dementias. Frontal lobes organize information and help to interpret experiences. In conditions like Alzheimer's disease/related dementias, frontal lobe problems are central to the neurological processes that underlie these conditions.



Caregiver FOCUS Series: Relaxation with Tibetan Singing Bowls

Come experience the healing benefits of Tibetan singing bowls that vibrate and produce a deep, rich tone creating beneficial changes that can reduce stress and restore balance.

Thursday, February 19; 12:30 - 2 p.m. at Banner Alzheimer's Institute, 3rd Floor Conference Room.

Free but registration is required. To register, call (602) 839-6850.



Ask The Expert

Lori Nisson, MSW, LCSW

Clinical Social Worker, Cleo Roberts Center, Banner Sun Health Research Institute

Dear Lori:

My mother has seen a neurologist specializing in memory loss and he has diagnosed her with dementia. I accompanied my mom to the office visit when the doctor clearly gave her the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. Since that appointment, she has refused to accept it and keeps telling family members there is nothing wrong with her. Can you help me make my mother understand and admit that she has dementia?

Sincerely,
Joe

Dear Joe:

Thank you for your question as your dilemma is very common one. Like any other disease, people with dementia deserve the opportunity to be given a clear diagnosis by a dementia specialist. However, the person with dementia frequently lacks awareness into their cognitive disorder. While it may seem logical to try to force or thrust her into believing or accepting her diagnosis, it isn't likely to be effective. Instead, try to think about the visual of standing by the person where they are. If she admits to forgetfulness, try to use that language. If she rejects the idea completely, similarly try your best to work around that.

It is often very difficult to cope with the idea that contradicts our inclination to use a logical approach to communication. It will be important for you to locate opportunities to attend educational lectures, join supports groups or seek individual counseling to assist you in shifting your approach to day to day strategies that more effectively manage the changes as they occur in your mother. The Family and Community Services team at both Banner Alzheimer's Institute and Banner Sun Health Research Institute offer many such programs to help support you. We also offer companion cards that can be handed to a waiter or service professional during an awkward situation to alert them that your mom has a memory disorder and asks for patience, without upsetting or causing her unnecessary shame in the process.

As you learn to use a more an empathic approach, this will lead to a more positive outcome. Getting the right tools through education and support can be invaluable in fostering a better relationship with your mom while offering the support you will need to navigate through this journey.

If you would like to learn more about this topic, we invite you to join in the February Dementia Dialogue (see education insert for details).

Clinical Trials Announcement

Healthy seniors: help us shed light on Alzheimer's disease. Despite progress being made in our understanding of Alzheimer's disease (AD), there's still a lot we don't know. Currently, there is no cure for Alzheimer's...and no way to delay its symptoms. The TOMMORROW study seeks to learn more about the early phase of Alzheimer's—a phase referred to as mild cognitive impairment due to Alzheimer's disease (or MCI due to AD). This important clinical research study is now seeking healthy senior participants between the ages of 65 and 83. To learn more: Call 602-839-6500 or visit www.TOMMORROWStudy.com

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.

Did you know, Banner Alzheimer's Institute is a not-for-profit and relies on financial contributions of the community to support programs and services offered to our patients and families? Make a gift and join our community of friends, call 602-747-GIVE (4483) or visit www.banneralz.org/waystogive.