

## **Partnering with Your Healthcare Provider**

Caring for a person living with dementia can be a complicated task. With ongoing changes in memory and thinking, it is often difficult to keep track of the changes that are occurring from one medical appointment to the next. Just as healthcare providers (HCP) try to manage chronic conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, etc. through routine follow-up visits, it is essential to get ongoing follow up for the person with Alzheimer's disease/related dementia.

Whether seeing a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant, it is important that you be able to communicate effectively with that person. This includes having conversations apart from your loved one so not to upset them with information that could trigger unwanted behavior (particularly when he/she lacks insight into the current situation). If you feel that your healthcare provider is not a good fit for you or your loved one, it is okay to find another practitioner to meet your needs. Asking for recommendations at a support group or calling the Alzheimer's Association Helpline for a list of medical providers who treat dementia might be a good place to start.

Many caregivers find that keeping a journal or list of observations, changes, and/or challenges can be helpful in communicating with your HCP. (Be sure that you keep an up-to-date medication list as you will be asked about this during your visit.) Often face to face time with the HCP is limited, so being organized to communicate your needs and concerns is imperative. If there is a lot going on, ask for a longer visit to be scheduled. Some caregivers will bring a sheet of summarized concerns for the HCP and others might consider mailing it ahead of the appointment. But, as you show up for the appointment, ask that the HCP read these comments before starting the visit. If you need time alone with the HCP, be sure to let the receptionist or medical assistant know.

With all of the concern for in-person visits, many HCPs are providing tele-visits. Use these just as you would for an in-person visit and don't delay setting appointments as you need them as it is imperative that you relay timely information about your person to the HCP. Don't worry that you are "bothering" the HCP as you have identified needs that should be addressed in a timely way. If in-person office visits or telehealth visits don't work for you, consider finding a HCP who can visit your loved one at home. There are a growing number of group practices who provide this service.

Don't let your loved one's HCP provide "diagnose and adios" care. There is so much that can be offered to keep your person comfortable as the condition changes and progresses. Having a good working relationship with the HCP can help ensure the best care for both of you.