

A New Paradigm of Living Well with Dementia

With over 6 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia and another estimated 18 million family and friends actively involved in caregiving, we need a more positive approach to helping both the affected person and their caregivers to live well. The United Kingdom has a national strategy called, "Live Well Pathway for Dementia." This encompasses:

- *Preventing well* to minimize the risk of developing dementia;
- *Diagnosing well* to ensure that a timely and accurate diagnosis is made;
- *Supporting well* to provide access to quality health and social service for both the affected person and family caregiver;
- *Living well* so that people with dementia can live normally in safe and accepting communities;
- *Dying well* that allows people with dementia to die with dignity and in a place of their choosing.

While any diagnosis of dementia is unwanted, knowing that there are strategies to help both the person and caregiver to manage and find success in daily life is essential. The current reality is that too often the person with memory and thinking changes is diagnosed way too late in their disease. Little hope is given when we focus on dementia as a "terminal illness" when delivering the diagnosis. We add to that hopelessness when a healthcare provider announces that the treatments are limited and may only be effective for 6 months. Visits to healthcare providers often focus on loss(es) v. abilities. This "diagnose and adios" approach must be challenged as we know there is so much that can be done to focus on living well despite the dementia diagnosis.

Over the coming weeks, we will discuss each of the preventing – diagnosing – supporting – living – dying well topics in greater detail. For now, imagine that Americans were better informed about each of these areas of living well [with dementia]. Imagine that Americans understood that communities can exist where people living with dementia and their caregivers could be supported v. stigmatized. Imagine that caregivers were connected with helpful support and services long before their health becomes compromised. And, imagine health systems and personnel that are fully prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to support both the person and family caregiver.

Dementia Friendly Tempe is serving as a model for beginning such change as we continue to host both support and educational sessions even through this pandemic. Join us as we inform and better educate our public and professionals to be not only "dementia friendly" but to share a vision that it is indeed possible to "live well."