**Myths and Stigmas about Alzheimer’s Disease**

**and Dementia**

As long as there is a stigma associated with Alzheimer's, people with the disease and their families will be far less likely to open up and seek help and support. Below are just a few of the most common myths and misconceptions:

* **Myth: Dementia and Alzheimer's is just normal aging.** Stating that Alzheimer's is not a disease and that dementia is due to normal aging is irresponsible. There's no cure or prevention, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't diagnose and treat the symptoms, take full advantage of therapies and supportive services, and plan responsibly for the future. Not recognizing Alzheimer's as a disease keeps people feeling even more shame and isolation.
* **Misconception: People with Alzheimer's become agitated, violent and aggressive.** No, not all people with Alzheimer's are agitated, violent or aggressive. The disease affects each person differently. Most often symptoms such as these are a result of the increased confusion and fear due to changes in the brain, as well as frustration from a decline in the person's ability to process information and communicate their needs verbally. By understanding the disease, caregivers and families can adapt their approach and methods of communication and prevent most negative behavior.
* **Misconception: People with Alzheimer's can't function, can't have a quality of life, and can't enjoy activities.** Not true! People with the disease can live meaningful, active lives. They can achieve a renewed sense of purpose. Earlier diagnosis and medications are helping with this. People with early stage Alzheimer's want to get the message out that they're living with Alzheimer's, not dying from it. In the later stages of the disease, those with Alzheimer's who are treated as whole human beings in positive environments can still give and receive great love, participate in activities and share moments of joy and laughter.

As long as these and many other myths and misconceptions about Alzheimer's continue, Alzheimer's will carry a stigma. This means that many of those impacted will tend to hide and withdraw in shame, fear, and embarrassment. Somehow, some way, we need to break down the stereotypes and stigma. Once we wholly understand and believe that individuals with the disease can maintain quality in their life well into the disease, and once we are open and honest about the disease itself, we can begin to change perceptions.

We could become a dementia compassionate community and society, taking dignified care of people with Alzheimer's (and related dementia) while embracing and accepting their families and caregivers.