

## **BETHANY LIFE COMMUNITIES ALZHEIMER'S CARE**

The Alzheimer's Association website ([www:alz.org](http://www.alz.org)) describes Alzheimer's disease as a progressive brain disorder that gradually destroys a person's memory and ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate and carry out daily activities. In later stages, individuals may also experience changes in personality and behavior, such as anxiety, suspiciousness or agitation. Although there is currently no cure, there are new treatments on the horizon. The Association also emphasizes that effective care and support can improve quality of life for individuals and their caregivers.

Alzheimer's care requires special approaches, and Bethany Manor was one of the pioneers in this field when it introduced Alzheimer's care back in 1990. Jean Engelson, Registered Nurse-Certified, has been with the program since its inception, and she remembers the many inquiries about this new (at the time) offering, including several from surrounding states. The initial capacity was quickly filled in 1990, and there are now two Memory Care Units (MCUs) at Bethany Manor. Although some people incorrectly refer to them as "Alzheimer's Wings", they actually provide care for persons with various forms of dementia. There is room for 34 residents in the MCUs, and a waiting list for admission is typical.

According to Jean, a primary care goal is to create a "small" world that enables an MCU resident to cope, because they have lost the ability to cope with the environment that we know. They are bombarded, overwhelmed, and frustrated with all that goes on in everyday life---they cannot filter out all the distractions. Ms. Engelson points out, "we have to work with them where they are at---we must join their reality". She adds that the care provided is approached as something that is done "for" them, not "to" them. "Our focus is to make their day calmer and go better".

The staff is trained to flex to accommodate the current needs of each resident in order to help them cope. The staff on each of the two wings must know the individual needs of 17 residents who are at different stages of health. This requires committed people with extraordinary patience and caring.

Staffers who work in the Memory Care Units must initially complete six hours of specialized training. On-the-job training and six hours of annual continuation training help further prepare them to provide memory loss care. According to Jean, the stability of the staff at Bethany's MCUs is a tremendous asset because effective care requires that rapport and understanding be established with each resident. "Although this work is not for everyone, many of our staffers don't want to work anywhere else", Jean says. She points out that there are many daily rewards as staffers help the residents cope with daily challenges. Even "small" victories are significant, and the staff can tell they are making a difference. At Bethany Manor, aspects of the Eden Alternative are also helpful for the MCU residents. They really enjoy visits from the cats and Scully, the dog. Scully's laid-back, affectionate personality is a calming and welcome influence.

If you need to learn more about care for Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, Jean suggests that you call Bethany Manor (733-4325) and make an appointment to come in and visit. An Alzheimer's support group that meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at 4 PM is an excellent source of information. If you have an impending need for care in your family and have identified a preferred care center, it is a good idea to get an

application on file. It can save time and provide a smoother transition when the care is ultimately needed.

Article from the March 2006 issue of The Neighbor, a monthly newsletter of Gilbert Lutheran Church, Gilbert, IA  
Authors: Connie and Al Bergman, Bethany Life Communities Ambassadors for Gilbert Lutheran Church