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Large Home Care Franchisor Wises Up on Dementia Training

By Elizabeth Jakaitis | July 13, 2017

Though most dementia patients die in skilled nursing facilities or long-term care facilities, more are dying in their [homes](#) than they were two decades ago, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). One training program for home caregivers focuses on managing behavioral issues caused by dementia to make home care longer.

Keeping seniors with dementia at home is dependent on caregivers who know how to build bonds, rather than engage in power struggles, said Deborah Bier, Ph.D., director of research for ComForCare, a home care provider with nearly 200 independently owned and operated franchise locations in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. This more effective approach begins before caregivers even walk through the door, Bier told Home Health Care News.

Bier created the DementiaWise training program for ComForCare caregivers and the family members of patients with dementia. It is an 8.5-hour course that focuses on dementia best practices that can keep home care patients in their homes longer. Not only is this beneficial for the quality of life for dementia patients who would like to stay at home, but it also saves tens of millions in state Medicaid dollars, according to a recent [study](#) published in The Gerontologist. Not to mention, longer care episodes mean more revenue for the home care provider.



The DementiaWise program is built on best practices that are simple but effective in dealing with the behavioral issues that dementia patients can experience. The primary rule is "be yourself," Bier said.

"It's important to have intentional body language when you walk in the door," Bier said. "When a caregiver shows anxiety and tension, a dementia patient is very sensitive to it. We teach people to watch their language and facial expressions. We never bring anything into a room with someone with dementia that we don't want brought back out."

The curriculum was reviewed by the Alzheimer's Association in April and received recognition in five areas: Alzheimer's and dementia disease awareness, strategies for care for a person with dementia, communications and understanding behavior, social needs and activities, and eating well. The DementiaWise workshop covers the reasons challenging behaviors occur in a dementia patient and offers five methods for creating better days. These include: focusing on feelings, minding emotional displays, respecting personal preferences, being person centered and improving communication skills.

Bier is a certified Alzheimer's educator and dementia practitioner, as well as a certified dementia care partner through the Dementia Care Professionals of America, a division of the Alzheimer's Foundation of America.

"We talk a lot about how tragic dementia is, but a lot of the suffering with dementia has to do with not knowing best care practices," Bier said. "Someone's who's highly demented never be easy to care for, but they can be peaceful, happy and have fun if they're cared for appropriately."

Written by [Elizabeth Jakaitis](#)

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