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Public Library to host Alzheimer's presentation

Oct. 3, 2018 | Jordan Houston

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AGAWAM – Alzheimer's disease affects around 5.7 million Americans of all ages – and the number is growing. While that statistic is unnerving, organizations like the Alzheimer's Association are dedicated to raising awareness and finding a cure – which is why the Association is coming to Agawam in late October.

Heather Jagodowski, a certified Dementia practitioner and program coordinator for the region's Alzheimer's Association branch, will be presenting "Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia" at the Agawam Public Library on Oct. 29. Jagodowski will offer resources for those who are either suffering with the disease personally or who want to learn more about it. The seminar will cover a variety of topics, including the impact of Alzheimer's, the difference between Alzheimer's and Dementia, the stages and risk factors of the disease and the current research and treatments available.

"It's important that people understand this disease because we're all living longer and it affects so many people," said Jagodowski. "We really need to eliminate the stigma of this disease. People can live very productive, healthy and fulfilled lives with Dementia – they just might need a little extra support from the community and people."

While this is Jagodowski's first time presenting at the library, the Association has given presentations there before. Agawam is considered a "Dementia-friendly community," said Jagodowski, which means the city supports educational opportunities and support services for those affected by the disease within the area.

"It is a movement where they [the City of Agawam] are trying to get more education and services to community members, especially for people who work with the public – they want to educate bank tellers and grocery store workers – or anyone that might be working with people that have Dementia – so that they can understand the disease and the challenges people living with the disease face," said Jagodowski.

"Let's say you're at Stop and Shop and you're behind a person having a hard time counting their change. A cashier could then offer to help count the change because they would have more understanding of the disease and empathy, instead of getting frustrated," she continued.

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and worsen over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

The disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of all dementia cases.

"The most popular question I get is, 'what is the difference between Alzheimer's and dementia?' The best way I can describe it is that dementia is an umbrella term for a set of symptoms, which often include impaired thinking and memory" said Jagodowski. "Alzheimer's is not reversible – sometimes there can be dementia-like symptoms where people think they're having issues with dementia which is why it's so important that they get an accurate diagnosis."

Although there is no current cure, treatment for Alzheimer's symptoms are available and research is continuing worldwide. The treatments can temporarily slow down the worsening of dementia symptoms.

The Alzheimer's Association is a voluntary health organization dedicated to Alzheimer's care, support and research. The group's mission is to find a cure, provide and enhance care and reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

Jagodowski's presentation will take place at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the public library. There are 99 spaces available and the event is free.

To register, head over to <http://www.eventkeeper.com/mars/xpages/A/AGAWAM/ekp.cfm?curOrg=AGAWAM>.

For more information about Alzheimer's and its risk factors, check out the Association's website at <https://www.alz.org/>.

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