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EDITOR'S PICK URGENT

Region experts offer advice on dealing with Alzheimer's, dementia

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There was silence as Melanie Whitfield shared her story of dealing with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Whitfield, marketing director at Arden Courts Memory Care Community, is a certified dementia practitioner instructor. She was one of two guest presenters during a resource fair hosted earlier this month by the Alzheimer's and Dementia Services of Northern Indiana in partnership with Legacy Foundation at the Lake County Public Library.

“The one thing I can stand up here and tell you about dementia is that it is totally unpredictable,” Whitfield said. “In the United States, over 200,000 are diagnosed with early onset, which is under the age of 65 years old. More resources have to go into learning about this baffling disease.”

Whitfield told a story about man's son getting arrested in his home and when police attempted to apprehend his son, the man tried to hit the officer over the head with a blunt object. Officers subdued the man when his wife yelled out, "Stop! He has dementia and doesn't know what's going on."

"All behavior, good, bad or indifferent has some sort of meaning," Whitfield said. "That man was just protecting his son, which in his eyes was probably a young boy instead of a grown man. Unfortunately, first responders are having to deal with these kind of situations all too frequently and it's all about educating the community."

The feature keynote speaker was neurologist Dr. Ender Akan, who spoke about advanced issues and strategies in Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

"This resource fair was very inspiring because it really speaks to the importance of providing the proper and compassionate care that these patients deserve," said Laura Carpenter, Journey Senior Living LLC marketing director. "We are very fortunate because Northwest Indiana has a lot of resources and educational initiatives that really have a positive impact in our communities."

Alzheimer's and Dementia Services of Northern Indiana community relations coordinator Leona Bachan said her organization takes pride in educating the community about a disease that seems to be becoming more and more prevalent.

“Alzheimer’s and dementia don't discriminate,” Bachan said. “No matter what your race, social status, gender or age. More that 70 percent with Alzheimer’s are living at home and a large percentage of that home care is provided by family and friends, so it’s imperative that we emphasize education and enriching quality of life.”

Bachan’s drive began when she found out that Alzheimer’s is more prevalent in those with Down syndrome. She instantly became concerned about her nephew.

“The third chromosome apparently makes those with Down syndrome more susceptible to early onset,” Bachan said. “We have to just keep pushing forward and fighting to make people more aware of this disease and providing the resources necessary to help make a difference.”



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About the series

This is the second story in a series about the impact Alzheimer's disease and dementia have on families in the Region and the resources that are available.

For your information

To learn more about Alzheimer's and dementia Services, visit www.alzni.org or contact ADSNI Community Relations Coordinator Leona Bachan at Leona@alzni.org.

A fundraising walk for Alzheimer's and Dementia Services begins with registration at 8:30 a.m. May 20 at Franciscan Communities, St. Anthony Village, 203 Franciscan Drive in Crown Point. Email lakecountywalk@alzni.org or call toll free 888.303.0180 ext. 7104 to register as an individual or a team. All services are for local families at no cost, which include counseling support groups and education initiatives.