



SHARE

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google Buzz
- Digg
- Stumble Upon
- RSS Feed
- Print This Page

# Wisdom on dementia from a veteran in the field

By Barbara Peters Smith, Herald-Tribune / Friday, September 28, 2012

Pam Polowski has been working with dementia patients in Sarasota for years, and she's full of stories — like the time she visited a woman who had “nothing in her refrigerator but two big heads of lettuce, wrapped in sweaters.” The woman also had quite a few offerings from Meals on Wheels lined up on her kitchen counter, untouched.

The point of this anecdote was that dementia patients often suffer from malnutrition — and it can even be the main cause of extreme symptoms for an older person who merely has some mild cognitive impairment and forgets to eat. Polowski, former program specialist for the Alzheimer's Association in Sarasota County and now a certified dementia practitioner with Infinity Home Care, led a workshop recently on Alzheimer's disease for JFCS, Jewish Children's and Family Services of Sarasota-Manatee.

One of her messages to caregivers in the audience: They know their loved one better than anybody else, and should trust their instincts when it comes to seeking a diagnosis. But, she added, they should realize how tempting it can be to deny what is happening.

“There is a fear on the part of that loved one as well,” she said, meaning the caregiver. “This means a huge transition for their life. A real diagnosis is probably the last thing they want to hear.”

She cited a Longboat Key couple she visited, where the wife insisted that her husband could still function at home. For example, the wife said, every morning her husband completed the crossword puzzle in his newspaper.

Polowski was skeptical, and asked her to check his puzzle the next day, and give her a call. To her surprise, the wife did call. “I hope you're not going to be smug about this,” Polowski said the wife told her. “I did look at the puzzle, and in all of the blocks there was a big zero.”

Polowski stressed that every dementia patient is unique, with uneven strengths and weaknesses. “When we say people are demented, it doesn't mean that they're crazy,” she said. “They have deficits. They cannot balance a checkbook, but they speak very fluently. They may be able to drive, but can't read a menu. It impacts everybody in a different way.”

Some other wisdom from Polowski's notebook:

– **Don't be so quick to place a person with cognitive impairment in a facility.**

“As we all age in place, we all lose a little ground. These are people that still have capacity. They might need a little assistance with their banking, or they're having difficulty finding their way around, but they're not ready for the nursing home.”

– **Don't buy your loved one the latest gadgets to make life easier, because learning how to operate new equipment can be difficult and stressful.** “This is why they hang on to their old things. Kids come down and say, I bought my mother a



**BARBARA PETERS SMITH**  
Barbara Peters Smith is the health and aging reporter for the Sarasota Herald Tribune. She can be reached by [email](#) or call (941) 361-4936.

## PULSE



**Local aging institute begins to grow up**

The Institute for the Ages was conceived as a “think and do tank,” drawing on Sarasota County's 120,000-plus elders as a resource.

[Read more »](#)

## BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



**Beyond breast cancer: One strong woman's journey**

Sense of humor, sense of resolve help woman battle breast cancer...and help

others

[Read more »](#)

## ALIX REDMONDE ON FITNESS



**Bike or dance your way to fitness this weekend**

Weekend workouts indoors or out. Fitness correspondent Alix Redmonde gives you a couple of choices in our area. Jazzercise and cycling.

[Read more »](#)

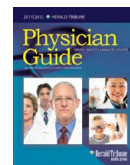
## Physician Guide



**Swift Auto Repair Inc**

Sarasota, FL

[Phone](#) | [More](#)



[Alternative Medicine](#)

[Dentists](#)

[Doctors](#)

[Medical Facilities](#)

[Medical Products](#)

[Specialties](#)

Search

[Popular Searches](#)

Browse the [full business directory](#)

Powered by [Local.com](#)

## DR. DONOHUE



**Which is better, heart valve replacement by surgery or catheter?**

The doctors answer questions on the relative merits of transcatheter replacement of the aortic heart valve, or cracking the breastbone open to reach the valve, degenerative changes in the spine and alopecia.

[Read more »](#)

## POLLS

**Which presidential candidate is best able to improve health care?**

new smartphone. I say, What did you do that for?"

– **Make sure a dementia patient drinks water and goes to the bathroom every two hours.** Dehydration can make symptoms worse. "Urinary tract infections are probably the thing that drive most of our folks to the doctor's office or the emergency room on a regular basis. Nobody wants to have a wet spot, so they stop drinking water. Almost all my dementia patients are dehydrated."

– **Age is by far the biggest risk factor for dementia; people over 85 have a 50 percent chance of developing it.** Heredity, by comparison, is a much smaller predictor, Polowski said, and getting tested for the Apolipoprotein E (APOE) genetic marker is "a personal choice. Make sure you have long-term-care insurance in place first, before you get the testing. If you have the APOE gene you will not be able to get it. This is a philosophical question. Ask yourself: Am I going to make changes in my life because of the test result?"

Last modified: September 28, 2012

All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be published without permissions. Links are encouraged.

SIMILAR STORIES



Beyond breast cancer: One strong woman's journey



Bike or dance your way to fitness this weekend



Local aging institute begins to grow up



Woman's harrowing ride on 'cancer coaster'

ADD A COMMENT (Limit 5,000 characters)

Name (required)

Email (will not be published) (required)

Comments that include profanity or personal attacks or other inappropriate comments or material will be removed from the site. Additionally, entries that are unsigned or contain "signatures" by someone other than the actual author will be removed. Finally, we will take steps to block users who violate any of our posting standards, terms of use or privacy policies or any other policies governing this site. Please review the full rules governing commentaries and discussions. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.

VIEWING 2 COMMENTS



**Thomas Kenyon** Friday, September 28, 2012 at 4:13 pm

Pam is one of this community's real jewels. Her point about making your long term care insurance purchase before you get any testing for APOE is spot on. The younger and healthier an individual is when they purchase long term care insurance, the less total premiums they will pay over their lifetime and the better odds they have of being able to obtain the coverage.



**Martha Stettinius** Friday, September 28, 2012 at 8:36 pm

Barack Obama  
Mitt Romney

[Polls Archive](#)

FIELD NOTES



**Study: Free birth control leads to fewer abortions**

Abortion, teen-birth rates plummet where free birth control available, study shows

[Read more »](#)

DR. OZ



**Dr. Oz: Ways to combat seasonal affective disorder**

Q: I have seasonal affective disorder, and before I get socked by winter depression,

tell me: What's the best way ...

[Read more »](#)

JANE BRODY



**The ongoing danger of whooping cough**

Every three to five years there is an epidemic of this disease in the United

States. One is occurring now, and it could turn out to be largest reported outbreak of pertussis in 50 years.

[Read more »](#)



OBESE AMERICA

Why is America so fat and what can we do

This is all excellent advice that I wish I had years ago, when I first became my mother's caregiver in 2005. Shifting from daughter to caregiver is truly a huge life transition, one that we don't always recognize right away as a new role-a job, in fact-but it is. -author of "Inside the Dementia Epidemic: A Daughter's Memoir"

<http://www.insidedementia.com>



about it? Reporter Barbara Peters Smith relays the latest research from the "Obesity Issues 2012" conference in Aurora, Colo.

## VISIT OUR OTHER WEB SITES

### HERALD-TRIBUNE

NEWS  
BUSINESS  
SPORTS  
OPINION  
CLASSIFIEDS  
REAL ESTATE

### TICKET SARASOTA

NIGHTLIFE  
MUSIC  
MOVIES  
DINING  
EVENTS

### ARTS SARASOTA

THEATER  
DANCE  
MUSIC  
VISUAL ARTS  
LITERARY ARTS

### HT PREPS

FOOTBALL  
BASKETBALL  
BASEBALL  
RECRUITING  
MORE SPORTS

### HT POLITICS

2012 ELECTIONS  
POLITICAL  
INSIDER  
CAPITAL  
COMMENTS  
RICK SCOTT  
WATCH

### INSIDE REAL ESTATE

SALE OF THE DAY

### HEALTH + FITNESS

FITNESS  
NUTRITION  
PULSE  
JANE BRODY  
PHYSICIAN'S GUIDE  
FIELD NOTES

### HT GOLF

LEAGUE RESULTS  
EVERYTHING  
GOLF  
MARK CARDON

### IBIS EYE

STORMS  
ALERTS  
NEWS

### SARASOTA MUGSHOTS

SARASOTA COUNTY  
MANATEE COUNTY  
CHARLOTTE COUNTY

### SOCIAL SARASOTA

OUT & ABOUT  
PHOTO GALLERIES  
STYLE MAGAZINE

### BETTER LIVING

HOUSING  
HEALTH  
FINANCE  
RESOURCES  
COMMUNITY DIRECTORY

### CONTACT US

Sarasota Herald-Tribune 1741 Main Street Sarasota, FL 34236

### TO ADVERTISE

Classified Advertising (941) 953-7755 | Retail Advertising - Sarasota: (941) 361-4000 | Manatee: (941) 745-7808 | Venice: (941) 486-3030