

## Looking at Alzheimer's care from a local perspective

Rachael Riggs/For the Times-Standard

Posted: 10/04/2011 02:20:14 AM PDT

While on a national level there is hope as the Obama administration develops the first national plan to combine research to fight dementia with help for caregivers, it is important to look a bit closer and see what is being done on the state and local level to support and care for those who are affected by Alzheimer's or a related dementia.

Last spring, California released its first Alzheimer's Disease State Plan. The plan was developed through a public-private partnership of the Alzheimer's Association and the California Department of Health and Human Services. The plan outlines six goals and recommendations to improve Alzheimer's care by 2021, none being greater than the need to eliminate the stigma that goes along with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. The plan emphasizes the need to educate the public and provide accurate educational materials to help reduce the stigma.

One of the members of the California Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Advisory Committee -- the group that came up with the ideas behind the California state plan -- is Humboldt County's own Dorelee Heisler. She is not only an advocate for those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, she also has Alzheimer's.

Heisler describes her experience with Alzheimer's like this: "Have you ever tried to get into a boat or kayak off a dock? You get one leg in the boat and the other leg is still on the dock. If the boat starts to move away, you try hard to keep the boat and dock together with a leg in each.

"To me that is my world of Alzheimer's. The boat is the Alzheimer's and the dock is the rest of the world. I keep trying to keep them together as much as possible. In doing that it can be fatiguing and exhausting."

Heisler is grateful for the state plan.

"The state plan is important to me. It will not only erase a lot of the fear people have of Alzheimer's but replace it with some understanding and ways to help families living with the disease," she said.

Heisler plans to help educate those in our community through her involvement in the Humboldt County Dementia Care Coalition.

Humboldt County is unique in many ways, and one of those is the approach to dementia care. An example is the Humboldt County Dementia Care Coalition, sponsored by the Humboldt Senior Resource Center. The coalition includes members from all over the county, including concerned community members, organizations, business owners, medical providers and those living with the disease. A main goal of the coalition is to improve dementia care and help create a "dementia-competent" community.

The coalition recognizes the need for awareness in the community about Alzheimer's and related dementias. In response to this need, it has developed a Speakers Bureau to provide basic education about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to any group that is interested, including senior living facilities, service organizations, doctor's offices and churches. With the curriculum almost finished, coalition members will be available to start giving presentations in December.

The Dementia Care Coalition also provides training opportunities for professionals and caregivers in the community throughout the year.

Humboldt County is home to two wonderful adult day health care centers: Eureka Adult Day Health Services, a program of the Humboldt Senior Resource Center, and Mad River Adult Day Health Care. These centers specialize in providing quality dementia care and are a key partner with families and care homes to ensure that people in our county are receiving the quality care they deserve.

Adult Day Health Care has been called the affordable option for care, with services averaging about \$15 an hour. Many people could not remain in the community setting without the support they receive from Adult Day Health Care. The programs are designed to help people stay mentally and physically active, reduce isolation, improve their health and prevent decline of their abilities. Services include therapeutic activities, games, health monitoring, social work, meals, dietary counseling, and physical, occupational and speech therapies.

According to one participant, "Adult Day Health Care gives me a chance to socialize. It increases my faith to see how other people are overcoming their problems and how far they have come. Therapy gives me hope for future improvements. Care and consideration from the staff is nothing short of fantastic. I can come in not feeling good and within a couple of hours they have me laughing. My son knows I'm somewhere where I have help, with nurses and other staff, and that he feels secure because he knows where I am during the day."

There has been much publicity about the state elimination of ADHC, which is a grave concern and will ultimately be settled in the courts. However, every effort is being made to continue a program that will provide services to our local community.

Last but not least, Humboldt County has the Alzheimer's Resource Center, another program of the Humboldt Senior Resource Center. The Alzheimer's Resource Center provides support and education to caregivers, has an extensive free lending library of books and videos, provides caregiver support groups throughout Humboldt and Del Norte counties, hosts the Friends Café (a group for those facing early memory loss) and publishes the Alzheimer's Newsletter quarterly.

The Alzheimer's Resource Center is a great starting point for families navigating the journey of Alzheimer's or a related dementia. Heisler relates these services to her experience in this way:

"As time goes by I see the boat getting further and further away from the dock. There will be a time when I have to get into that Alzheimer's boat, but there will be a rope to the rest of world to help me stay in touch as much as possible. To me that rope will be the Alzheimer's Resource Center and Adult Day Health Care."

-----

Rachael Riggs is the program manager of the Alzheimer's Resource Center at the Humboldt Senior Resource Center. For more information visit [www.humsenior.org](http://www.humsenior.org). The Humboldt Senior Resource Center offers activities, hot lunches, home-delivered meals, care management, adult day health care, Alzheimer's services, long-term care ombudsman and a monthly newspaper, Senior News. To learn more about any of the resources mentioned in this article, call the Alzheimer's Resource Center at 444-8254 ext. 3220.