

Fighting to Remember: November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

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In 1983, President Ronald Reagan declared

November National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month. Eleven years later, he was diagnosed with the disease and it eventually claimed his life. President Reagan is now an example of how common Alzheimer's and other memory related disorders are in the United States and new data on Adult Care Homes in North Carolina shows just how much the state is affected by the disease.

According to the 2016 NC DHSR Licensure Section data from provider license renewals, 45 percent of the current population of residents in NC Adult Care Homes and 20 percent of the current population of residents in NC Family Care Homes has documented Alzheimer's disease or a memory related illness. The Alzheimer's Association reports, however, this type of data is useful, but insists that it is a little misleading.

In their research with Maryland assisted living facilities in 2004 the Alzheimer's Association found many assisted living residents with these conditions do not have a formal diagnosis, and assisted living staff members do not always recognize the conditions in their residents. Thus, studies that rely on diagnosis and staff reports will miss some residents with the conditions and the data isn't entirely reflective. Their study results concluded that at least half of assisted living residents age 65+ have Alzheimer's disease, whether it has been reported or not.

With these statistics in mind, Alzheimer's Awareness month is a great time to give a refresher course to all staff on the signs of Alzheimer's disease and help residents get the medical attention they need for having difficulties in memory. Too often warning signs are dismissed as "normal conditions of aging." Aging should not be blamed for memory loss, difficulty performing familiar tasks or trouble interpreting one's everyday environment. According to Angel Tree Consulting, the 10 warning signs of the disease are:

- Memory Loss that disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning or solving problems
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
- Decreased or poor judgement
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Changes in mood or personality

Recognizing warning signs of dementia as early as possible is instrumental in the diagnosis and treatment of dementia, seeking a medical assessment will determine the exact cause of any symptoms present should dementia not be the cause.

NCALTCF is committed to helping providers meet the challenges of this disease and provide them with training materials. The association offered three trainings on dementia during the 2017 Convention and Trade Show in September. Mary Ann Drummond with Angel Tree Consulting taught a track training class on Dementia Care, Kristen Schottenheimer gave a motivational speech on how to cope with a loved one with Alzheimer's since her dad former NFL coach Marty Schottenheimer now has the disease and Janet Tomkins with Comfort Companion did a training at our Trade Show on how dolls can provide comfort to resident's with dementia, while she displayed her dementia dolls for purchase. The association hopes to hold more Alzheimer's disease trainings in the future and welcomes everyone to join in on raising awareness.