

Understanding Dementia and Adapting for Positive Outcomes: Caregiver Support Series

Sponsored by Appalachian State University and
Blue Cross NC Institute for Health and Human Services

Series Description

As the number of people living with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia grows nationwide, family members continue to provide the majority of care (over 75%) at home and in the community. Many local families around the High Country have been supporting a loved one with dementia for a decade or longer—and when it comes to dementia caregiving, these experienced families explain, “Our situations are *always changing*.”

Recognizing changes throughout the journey of dementia can feel like detective work, and constantly adjusting to the “new normal” can challenge even the most adaptive families. At App State and IHHS, we’re here to help!

Dr. Heather McKay, Occupational Therapist and Dementia Care Specialist will facilitate an educational series aimed at helping family caregivers understand and adapt to dementia-related challenges throughout the disease progression. Since effective, family-focused care requires collaborative problem-solving in addition to new knowledge and skills, Dr. McKay will help caregivers translate what they learn throughout this series into real-world solutions in their care environments. With support from a dementia care expert *and each other*, families can continue to provide the right care at the right time, improving life for everyone involved at every stage of the journey.

Series Logistics

This is a 6-part educational series offered on six Wednesdays (every other week) in Spring 2024. All sessions will be held at the Blue Cross NC Institute for Health and Human Services Clinic on the first floor of Leon Levine Hall at **1179 State Farm Rd.**

***** Fun For All***** Families are encouraged to come to this event together. While caregivers attend sessions in Group Room A, fun and social activities will be offered for their partners with dementia in Group Room B, facilitated by Mary Strong, LCSW, LCAS and students in App State’s Department of Social Work.

**REGISTRATION REQUIRED ASAP! SPACE IS LIMITED TO 10 FAMILIES: CALL 828-262-8658
OR EMAIL strongme@appstate.edu**

Sessions will occur at **9:30 am-11 am** on the following dates with these topics:

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 9:30-11:00 am	What's Dementia and What's Not?
Our series will begin with deepening your understanding of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia and demystifying the diagnostic process. Dr. McKay will distinguish between "red flags" and normal forgetfulness in healthy brains so that families can address potential problems early and avoid sweating the small stuff.	
Wednesday, Feb 21, 9:30-11:00 am	Recognizing Changes Associated with Dementia
In session 2, we will connect the dots between predictable changes in different areas of the brain (focusing on preserved strengths, not just losses in memory, thinking, language, movement, mood, and others) and everyday challenges that arise for you and your loved one. After this session, you will be able to explain <i>why</i> behavioral symptoms are common for people with dementia, trace the root cause of dementia-related challenges, and create effective solutions that enable you and your loved one to do the things you want or need to do together.	
Wednesday, March 6, 9:30 am-11 am	Communicating When Words Don't Work—It Starts With Your Approach
Building on knowledge from previous sessions, session 3 will help you understand why dementia is notorious for communication breakdowns. Additionally, you will learn new strategies to improve interactions and communication in two categories: having social visits, and doing activities together. Research supports what observant dementia caregivers notice in real life—effective communication is not just about <i>what</i> you do but <i>how you do it</i> . Making a good first impression, and maintaining a positive emotional vibe throughout your interaction with a person living with dementia can make doing things together easier and social visits more satisfying for you both. So, after this session, you will feel more confident about the purpose and 7 key steps of a dementia care technique known as Positive Physical Approach (PPA) along with other non-verbal strategies designed to start interactions on the right foot and maximize participation and safety for everyone involved. Real stories from your experience and others will bring communication struggles and successes to life while Dr. McKay and participants will add many practical, ready-to-use strategies to your communication toolbox.	
Wednesday, March 20, 9:30 am-11 am	Easing Distress and Other Challenging Behavioral Symptoms of Dementia
The purpose of this session is to introduce strategies to improve interactions and communication in a third category: <i>easing distress</i> . Dementia is undoubtedly upsetting at times for the person with the condition and their caregivers, and the challenge can feel compounded when caregivers' explanations of the facts fall flat. More real stories of dealing with distress and other behavioral symptoms illuminate what caregivers are noticing in these	

challenging times. Together with Dr. McKay and others, you'll see videos of caregivers relieving distress for people who have dementia, analyze the strategies that work in real situations, and brainstorm more "pro tips" that you may try at home.

**Wednesday, April 3,
9:30 am-11 am**

Adapting Along the Timeline of Dementia: Early and Middle Stages

This session is all about dementia's timeline and matching support to the person's evolving needs along the progression of the condition. As one caregiver wisely said, "When it comes to dementia care, what worked for you yesterday is not guaranteed to work for you today." Therefore, in this session, you will learn about the progression in 5 stages and recognize certain symptoms as "road signs" marking new functional levels and specific needs. Keeping in mind the person's preserved strengths, not just losses in each stage, Dr. McKay will coach families in selecting the appropriate type and amount of assistance to offer someone during the early- and middle stages of the condition. After this session, you'll feel more confident to tailor your support to match a person's changing needs and foster more positive relationships with people during the early and middle stages of dementia.

**Wednesday, April 17,
9:30 am-11 am**

**Providing the Right Care at the Right Time in Late-Stage Dementia and
Maintaining Your Brain**

In our final session, we will continue learning about the progression of dementia and practical, ready-to-use communication strategies and safe hands-on skills matched to the late stage. From her years of work in palliative care and hospice, Dr. McKay will share more stories of families and professionals preparing for and redesigning plans as the person's needs change to continue providing the right support at the right time. Our series will conclude with tips to maintain your brain at any age, including three key essential components of a brain health program and a "top ten" list of best brain exercises with strategies to grade up or down for *your* just right challenge.

Speaker Bio

Dr. Heather McKay, PhD, OTR/L is an occupational therapist, dementia care specialist, and international trainer/speaker on topics related to dementia care and caregiver education.

She is a graduate of the master's Occupational Therapy program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She received her PhD in occupational therapy from Texas Woman's University. **Heather is currently an Assistant Professor at Appalachian State University Occupational Therapy Program in the Beaver College of Health Sciences.**

Heather is a recognized trainer of the Alzheimer's Association, a member of Dementia Care Professionals of America, and a PAC Certified Dementia Care Consultant. In 2016, the Alzheimer's Foundation of America named Heather "**Dementia Care Professional of the Year**" for her dedication and devotion to serving individuals living with dementia, their families, professionals, and her community.

As **manager of Partnerships for Health**, Heather provides consultation for family caregivers and dementia workforce development for organizations nationwide. Among other partners nationwide, Heather has collaborated with the National Association of State Veterans Homes, Armed Forces Veterans' Homes Foundation, AMVETS Service Foundation the Air Force Sergeants' Association to produce the caregiver training video series, ***Dementia Care for America's Heroes*** featuring family caregivers in the Long Island State Veterans Home. The film series received the National **Caregiver Friendly Award**.

In addition to her work in dementia care education, Heather served for 10 years as the Director of Disease Management for a Hospice and Home Health agency in North Carolina. Heather has worked in hospital, home health, and community settings. She has personal as well as professional experience with dementia caregiving and welcomes all personal *and* professional perspectives.

You can learn more about Heather and her work in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences at [Dr. McKay's App State faculty profile](#).