

Facility provides 'can-do' care to its dementia clients

By JOHN MATUSZAK - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, February 18, 2016 6:00 am

ST. JOSEPH — In the not-too-distant past, it was assumed that dementia sufferers could do little or nothing as their mental abilities declined.

Today, PACE of Southwest Michigan is among the care facilities – and the only one in the region – using the Memory Care program, which presumes everyone can do something. It encourages seniors to stay active mentally – even those with Alzheimer’s.

“They can do things. It just looks a little different,” said Lindsey Stewart, an activities coordinator with PACE (Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly), providing day care services at its location along Lakeview Avenue in St. Joseph. “It’s a more positive approach to dementia care.”

Stewart, a certified dementia practitioner, said she saw the Memory Care program in action when she worked at a nursing home in Indianapolis, and wanted to bring it to PACE when she joined the staff a year ago.

This approach reaches clients by acknowledging their own unique interests, likes, dislikes and capabilities, and by praising their accomplishments and reducing stress and frustration, she said.

Previously, dementia care focused on the perceived deficit in cognition and treated it mostly by alleviating negative behavior through medication. This often led to over-medication that further reduced a person’s ability to communicate and deepened their dependence, Stewart said.

Modern care recognizes dementia as a decline, and focuses on working with each person at their own level of ability.

Shining star

PACE’s Daily Rhythms Shining Star program schedules activities to encourage and maintain that level for as long as possible.



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Lindsey Stewart, activities coordinator for PACE of Southwest Michigan, guides a participant in the Memory Care program, designed to assist those with dementia. The program focuses on the individual’s abilities and encourages mental activity.

“I like coming here because everyone believes in me,” commented one client in the PACE fall newsletter. “There is always something for me to do – things that I used to do but different so I can do them better.”

The PACE Memory Care program started in September with 21 clients, and Stewart said she has seen definite success in slowing the progress of dementia in some participants.

Individualized care starts with the “All About me” portfolio, assembled with the help of family members, to list a person’s former occupation, relatives, hobbies, personal preferences. This provides staff with a starting point to engage the person in conversation that often plumbs their deepest recollections in vivid detail.

Therapists further conduct a functional assessment to determine a participant’s general level of ability, so that failure-proof activities can be provided that allow each person to shine no matter their level of cognition.

Participants are assigned a color-coded star on their charts to inform staff of their current level of cognitive ability. Clients are re-assessed every six months.

Music is a favorite activity to bring clients out of their shells. One client plays piano for her friends at PACE. Others prefer art and painting. One woman, who had been a designer for Las Vegas casinos, enjoys activities with colors and patterns.

Home and family

Memory Care has proven to be beneficial to family members, as well, with whom the PACE participants spend most of their time during the week, Stewart said.

“I have seen Mom interact with others more,” one family member told PACE staff. “She is more alert. It is encouraging to have these special moments with her.”

The Memory Care program fits in with PACE’s goal of helping clients stay independent in their own homes or with family, and out of nursing homes, for as long as possible, Schaffer said.

Research has shown that seniors who stay in their homes are healthier and live longer. Day care and home care programs also are much less costly than a nursing home stay.

Memory Care is the latest innovation to be offered by PACE. The center uses NuStep exercise machines to encourage physical fitness, combined with other activities that promote brain power. Last year clients hatched and released 42 Monarch butterflies, and planted a garden for them. They are tracking the progress of their migration to Mexico on a website, and are duplicating their mileage by attempting to pedal the 2,136-mile journey on the NuStep machines.

Stewart emphasized that, at present, there is no cure for dementia, but its effects can be slowed.

“We’re not curing them. It’s about maintaining,” Stewart said.

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