

As more people reach the 'golden years,' need for memory-care services grows

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There is a growing need for memory care in today's senior population and with that, more senior living facilities and home health care providers are offering aid for people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Over 100,000 Minnesotans have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and with the aging "Baby Boomer" population, the care needs for those individuals is growing, says Marsha Berry, professional education manager for the Alzheimer's Association Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter.

In addition to the increasing need for health professionals who can provide care in a patient's home, the same trend is there when it comes to memory-care units in the Twin Cities, Berry says.

Care providers who work in a person's home offer a twofold service. They often help the patient as well as the person's primary caregiver, who is most often a spouse or close family member.

"The primary caregiver spends all their time with their loved one, and they neglect themselves. We see oftentimes that the primary caregiver ends up in the hospital (rather) than the patient with memory loss," says Mary Rempfer, the vice president and general manager at Home Instead Senior Care.

The company, which is an international franchise with an office for the northern suburbs of St. Paul, provides caregivers who are trained to help clients in their homes, nursing homes or memory-care units, Rempfer says.

Their primary responsibility is to offer companionship, she says.

"What we have found is people who stay in their familiar environment have a tendency to do better," she says.

Care away from home

However, memory care has also become a specialized service offered at many independent and assisted-living facilities. Frequently, residents start out in an independent apartment, transition to an assisted-living unit, and when more intensive care is needed, the facility is equipped to provide additional help specifically designed for people with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

After many discussions about the growing need to help their residents suffering from Alzheimer's disease, **Oak Meadows** Independent and Assisted Senior Living in Oakdale opened The Woods memory care unit in March.

"For people who see **Oak Meadows** as their home, they won't need to leave to get memory care if their situation calls for it," says board of directors president Barb Peterson. "They can stay in a very familiar setting (with) the people that they know."

Oak Meadows' memory care unit has 12 apartments, says Melody Oaks, director of community relations. "We really wanted to help them age in place and provide that level of care here."

There will be room for 14 people, including two one-bedroom apartments for married couples already living at **Oak Meadows**.

"Memory care is more so to provide a safe setting, where individuals feel safe. That helps them avoid confusion and anxiety," Oaks says. "Our goal is to provide a sense of home and belonging and dignity and quality of life."



Oak Meadows Board President Barb Peterson and Jeanette McAnally, the first tenant at The Woods memory care unit, participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony.



submitted photos
Top, A kitchen was added to the dining room and tenants can help there with cleaning or cooking when activities are held. Just above, The Woods features an activity lounge with a television and bird aviary. The memory care unit was built with amenities that help tenants feel at home and comfortable.

Finding the best help

Some people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may still be at the point where they are best served with care in their own home, Berry says.

In fact, 70 percent say they prefer home care to memory care in an institution, but professional caregivers are continually needed to work in either setting, she says.

About 5.2 million people in the United States have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and someone develops the disease about every 71 seconds, Berry says.

With a growing population in need of care, and the many levels of services that are available, Rempfer says family members should evaluate the needs and goals of their loved one.

For example, they should discuss if the person with memory loss would be better served in their own environment at home, or in a senior living facility that offers memory care as well as structured social activities, she says.

Overall, Berry says as long as a patient with dementia or Alzheimer's disease is provided with "person-centered" care, the location where it occurs is not the most important factor.

She adds that doctors are able to diagnosis Alzheimer's disease earlier than in the past. However, because people are living longer about 50 percent of people over age 85 have Alzheimer's disease, so there's more need for memory care, she says.

When asked if there are any limitations in providing memory care to people, Rempfer says if there is a need, care providers will "rise to the occasion."

"People are seeing more and more of a need, and they're creating resources to meet that need. Down the road, we'll probably need more because the amount of seniors we'll have on our hands," Rempfer says.

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