

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In honor of World Alzheimer Day, the Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer's Disease Center at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine presented the film viewing of "I Remember Better When I Paint", a documentary, narrated by Olivia de Havilland, about the positive impact of art and other creative therapies on people with Alzheimer's and how these approaches can change the way we look at disease and how the worlds of art, science and medicine intersect. Thank you so much for your attendance and participation.



It was through Berna Huebner's own personal odyssey with her mother's experience of Alzheimer's that she was able to see how creativity changed her mother's life. When she was trying to connect with her mother, an artist struggling with Alzheimer's, she asked, "Mother, do you want to paint"? And, to her amazement, she responded, yes, "I remember better when I paint". These words were the catalyst for the project that brought over 100 people to Northwestern on Friday, September 21st.

While we are looking for a cure for Alzheimer's disease, what we do have to offer our patients and families are life enrichment programs or as Berna quoted the words of the author, Gail Sheehy, "...to find a new pathway to engage with a loved one you thought was lost."

Following the film, we heard from four panelists: Art therapist Deb DelSignore, MAAT, ATR-BC remarked how the film depicts the power of the arts for persons living with dementia in a way that no other film had done before. She said "Art brings us into the now...it stimulates the senses, it awakens people. The experience of making art exists in the now..." As professionals we have a responsibility to facilitate opportunities for making art accessible, effective, safe and respectful for those who want to engage in it and focus on potential vs. limitations and not be concerned about "getting it right". Art also can open the eyes of the family caregivers, allowing them to see the person, the reminder of who the person is to them and not just what they have lost. The film starts the discussion around how we can go forward and make opportunities to use the arts in ways some have thought unimaginable.

Following Deb DelSignore, Beth Kallmyer, Vice President of Constituent Services for the Alzheimer's Association remarked on the focus of World Alzheimer Day 2012 - "Overcoming the Stigma of Dementia". Stigma can create significant obstacles to the well-being and quality of life and can prevent early diagnosis and access to services. Creative expression can bring meaningful opportunities for social engagement, a supportive environment, and the opportunity to exercise one's autonomy and choice. The Alzheimer's Association is involved in an early stage engagement pilot program exploring creative outlets. We discussed the importance of finding ways to measure the effects of these programs quantitatively and we all agreed a larger discussion about this is essential.



Dr. Jay Gottfried, Northwestern neurologist and neuroscientist emphasized the uniqueness of the individual's strengths and interests and to help engage people in things they like and want to do. The film shows how far reaching art therapy has become and how it contributes to preserving the self and fostering engagement.

Finally, David Moscow, family caregiver and CNADC board member showed a powerful film of how his wife Linda was dramatically and positively affected by engaging in the arts.

Questions and discussion then focused on the need for funding more creative arts interventions, to present this work at national and international meetings and demonstrate how these kinds of programs are changing the lives of persons with dementia and their families.

My hope is that we will stay in touch with each other and continue to share our stories.

With best wishes,

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