

# **Dementia cases expected to rise in county**

## **Alzheimer's group plans walk to help support programs for residents dealing with disease**

Grant County Herald Independent - Over the next 15 years, the number of cases of Grant County seniors being diagnosed with either Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia are expected to rise by more than 15 percent, according to the non-profit organization looking to help those affected by the disease in southwest Wisconsin which is planning its annual fundraiser this month.

According to Paul Rusk, Executive Director of the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin who recently addressed the Grant County Board, there are 1,185 individuals who currently suffer from Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. A vast majority of them, 599, are over the age of 84. Rusk stated that by 2025, the total number of individuals dealing with dementia will be 1,356, with 684 over the age of 84.

"We are going to have a big increase," Rusk said of the estimates, adding that when it comes to different forms of dementia as well as Alzheimer's, there is no one treatment or way to handle a particular patient. "Dementia is a complicated disease, you have to strike at it in many ways," Rusk stated.

Because of the increased demand in southwest Wisconsin, an outreach specialist position was created years ago for Grant and Richland counties. That specialist works out of the Aging and Disability Resource Center in Lancaster. The post was initially sponsored in part by a grant which ran out last year. "We didn't work hard all these years just to give up," Rusk said of the position. "We have been able to reach a lot of people. This post is to help people with this long journey."

Over the past three years, with the specialist's hotline and individual care consultation, as well as hosting support groups and programs for health fairs, community education and for law enforcement, the regional post has served 7,142 people. Some of the duties the specialist has picked up are to launch support group sessions in communities across the county, such as a recent one launched in Lancaster.

Working without the grant for funding the post is just one of the big changes for the group. Originally the south central chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, they broke away from the national group in December of last year. The group wanted to make sure its focus was on helping individuals affected by Alzheimer's and dementia locally, and that money raised locally would stay in the region to help.

The Alliance is also helping direct individuals to the new Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center designation given to UW-Madison Alzheimer's research program this past May. Designated by the National Institute of Health, the program is only one of 17 given across the country, and will spend the next five years researching

new treatment strategies, investigating the processes in the brain, and trying to find effective prevention strategies.

“There is no other organization that has a pipeline for sharing information on research,” said Becky DeBuhr, the current outreach specialist who covers Grant and Richland counties.

DeBuhr pointed out that information services are going to be in more and more demand since approximately 70 percent of those diagnosed with some form of dementia are taken care of by either their spouse or an adult child. Helping those caregivers as the disease progresses creates a greater workload, and makes sure the caregiver is also not a victim because of caring for their loved one.

To help fund the outreach post, as well as other programs, the Alzheimer’s and Dementia Alliance will carry on the annual Alzheimer’s Walk in Grant County on Saturday, Sept. 18.

In July, a group of organizers for this year’s walk, the eighth edition of the event, got together at the Congregational Church in Lancaster to discuss the 2010 event. “I am so happy to see all of the support,” said DeBuhr of the group. Last year’s event collected more than \$30,000.

“We use this walk not only as a fundraiser, but as a means to raise awareness,” said Miriam Boegel, Director of Development for the Alliance, who noted that the change keeps dollars raised in the region. “We would have had to lay off staff and with all the calls for help we didn’t think that was right,” she said.

Many in the group stated that Alzheimer’s and dementia are often diseases of denial, where the individual affected often denies that he or she has a problem, and family and friends often chalk up problems with the affects of aging. Brian Quick, a physician’s assistant at Family Medical Center whose grandmother is suffering Alzheimer’s, noted that forgetting things is common, but that “when it affects your daily life, that’s when you need to come in” for a diagnosis. He added that many either do not recognize the personality changes in the person affected, or they just think they will snap out of it. “That early diagnosis is so important because treatments are so much more effective early on,” Quick said.

As far as the new Alliance, Quick said he feels it is much more effective than if it were part of a national group. “They get a lot more done than if they were sending their money out of the state,” Quick said. “There are a lot of good things coming up on the horizon, and I think people see that.”