

# Planning Key For Caregivers In Alzheimer's

By Suzanne Faith, RN Psych

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease can be devastating for the entire family. There is no current cure, but good planning can make a difference in the length of time someone can stay living at home in the community. It also helps relieve stress and provides essential support for the caregiver's health.

Too often, however, families wait until the disease has created significant behavioral and personal hygiene issues making some alternatives for care no longer appropriate or available.

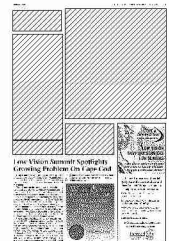
— That's why it's so important for a trained social worker to hold an early initial interview and assessment with family caregivers. Often they're telling their story for the first time. This helps in creating a specialized structure and strategies to plan for the future.

The stress involved in full-time caregiving can be staggering. One third of all family members caring for people with Alzheimer's suffer from depression and two thirds report high to very high emotional stress.

Typical aspects of care planning can include consulting elder law attorneys to ensure the legal documents of a Health Care Proxy and Durable Power of Attorney are in place. Delay can create a situation where individuals are no longer competent to sign for themselves. Families can avoid costly expenses of guardianship if documents are drafted and signed early.

Insurance policies must be examined to understand the benefits and under what circumstances they can be accessed. If the individual or even the spouse is a veteran, they may be eligible for the Veterans Aid and Attendance Pension.

A good emergency home plan should include registering your family member with your local police department for the Massachusetts Silver Alert program. Forms can be obtained through Hope Dementia & Alzheimer's Services, most councils on aging and at local police stations. The primary caregiver as well as the individual with dementia should wear a Safe Return ID bracelet. So if the caregiver has an accident while the family member is there alone, responders would know they have to go to the home.



Many community resources are for families, including adult day health programs and Meals on Wheels. The CARES support groups offered by Hope Dementia & Alzheimer's Services meet twice monthly at various host facilities including councils on aging. They offer parallel groups for the caregiver to get support while those with dementia engage in positive socialization. Respite grants are available to help families start adult day programs, bring help into the home, or provide an overnight stay in a care facility. Grants are available to any family who is caregiving for someone with dementia and can be applied for once a calendar year.

A good care plan involves putting together the pieces of a complex puzzle. No one can do this alone. Asking for help can be the hardest, but most important step.

**(Ms. Faith is Senior Director of Hope Dementia & Alzheimer's Services, 508-775-5656 or SFaith@HopeDementia.org.)**



**CELEBRATING AT THE HOUSE OF HOPE:** Thanks to a record \$750,000 donation from the family's foundation, the lower level of the McCarthy Care Center in East Sandwich has been completed with facilities to provide comfort for families and staff. Marking the dedication of the Anne and Donald McGraw Center for Caring are, from left, David Rehm, President/CEO of HopeHospice; and members of the McGraw family, David, Melissa and their daughter Erin. Inset, Mary McCarthy, herself, a co-founder of Hospice on Cape Cod, also participated in the program with a special tribute to the late Jack Jillson, a long-time Hospice supporter who donated the land on which the McCarthy Care Center was built.