Dementia and Denial Factsheet

From experience we believe there are some substantial risks involved when people are in denial about dementia, we have come up with some ideas about how to maintain a realistic outlook on your loved one's care, and thoughts on helping your other family members do the same.

Risks of Denial

Overdosing on Medication

Refusing to accept that your loved one has Alzheimer's or dementia can lead to bigger problems, like your loved one overdosing on medications…
Example taken from a Dementia article - My mother-in-law gave us a scare. We thought by getting a weekly pill dispenser, the kind with the days of the week, it would be easier for her to take her medications. We organized all the pills and explained it to her one morning. A few days later we noticed all the pills were gone. She seemed okay, so she probably threw them out. But we then realized we had to dispense medications ourselves." Ensuring that someone with dementia is integral too good care and can stabilise the illness.

Accidents

Not accepting that your loved one has declined to another level of care can be dangerous. Ignoring the fact that they need some assistance to walk can lead to a fall, resulting in broken bones, displaced joints, hospitalisations and the use of pain medication. Leaving them unsupervised could lead to accidents in the kitchen, the bathroom, and even a fire. They could cut or burn themselves, leave the stove on, or eat certain foods in excess. Some families have set up life lines for their loved ones; installing a web cam to watch over their loved ones in their own home.

Family Conflict

Any family caring for a loved one does not come without emotional stress and conflict.
Denial on the part of a family member can cause major family conflict. The ones in denial create all kinds of frustration for the ones who are facing the disease. The people in denial don't help out and the aware ones take on multiple burdens sometimes alone. Often the ones in denial accuse their siblings of 'over reacting.' Sometimes families don't think extra care is needed and Mum or Dad/loved ones can be retrained to make their own meals or dress themselves. This can be frustrated for all family members as at best the aim is for a loved one is to stabilise a situation.

Delaying Professional Help

Over the 6 years we have been operating it has been common that often a spouse is very aware that their husband or wife has memory disease but they don't want anyone else knowing about it. Some spouses lovingly try and protect their spouse from the outside world and begin to hibernate. Maybe in the beginning stages a spouse can handle providing the needed care, but as it snowballs, it will become overwhelming. Caring for a loved one at home is draining physically, mentally and emotionally. This can put a strain on a marriage and family setting, honesty is the best policy.

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Missing Opportunities for Quality Time

It is painful seeing a parent/grandparent no longer able to hold a long, intelligent conversation. Sometimes communication can become that of a young child. So instead of visiting family members regularly, it becomes less and less. The long term effect is that carers/family lose the chance to create special memories with the loved one 'this often leaves the family feeling guilty, which is sad for all

Not Getting Papers in Order

Another problem stemming from denial could be not getting the needed legal papers in place, such as financial power of attorney and written permission for adult children to see their health records. Without those in place, getting proper care, dealing with finances, and authorising needed medical procedures can be difficult.

The government has made life slightly easier, no longer do you have to use your family solicitor and pay lots for the legalities', all can be found on line https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/make-a-lasting-power-of-attorney it is very comprehensive and covers every legal

Once the forms are signed and fees paid you can return by post, much easier and advisable to be obtained/downloaded in the very early signs/diagnosis of dementia.

Carers Health Decline

Family carers also put their own health at risk when they are in denial about the help they need caring for a loved one. It is said that carers over the age of 66 have a 63% higher mortality rate than non-carers, and that "often the carer dies before the loved one they are taking care of does." In our experience it is integral for carers/families to communicate and ask for help if you need it, this is often the hardest thing, excepting that things are not ok and needing support with a loved one can often make a family/spouse feel like they have failed, this is not the case.

Preventing Denial

We believe that one of the best ways to prevent or overcome denial is a family meeting, the Alzheimer's website, said: "If possible, a family meeting should be held right after the initial diagnosis is obtained. The sooner everyone realises that their loved ones will no longer be able to care for themselves in the near future, the less denial will be brought forward."

An article called "Denial is Dangerous "by Carole B. Larkin, includes tips to help overcome denial among your family members. For example, "Help them to understand that fear is overruling logic," and, "Explain that denial or doing nothing is actually doing something; and that doing nothing is going to cause more pain for all involved.