

# Dementia Advice

We are now well into the chill of winter. As you warm your hands on a mug of hot tea, please enjoy this issue of the Dementia Advice Bulletin. Much gratitude to the Dementia Advice nurses for providing content for this issue of the Dementia Advice Bulletin.

## What's New at Dementia Advice?

We celebrated our one-year anniversary! Last September 28, 2015, we began to serve Albertans. The stories we have heard, and the advice and support we have provided have highlighted not only the need that exists for dementia-related advice among Albertans but also the honour of witnessing the struggle and challenge of those living with dementia and caring for those with dementia.

## How Are Things Going?

- The Dementia Advice nurses are spending an average of 5 hours and 42 minutes per referral they receive from callers to Health Link. When all calls come into Health Link they are first triaged by a Health Link nurse. A few of those callers require specialized advice from a Dementia Advice nurse. When a Dementia Advice nurse receives a referral, they first research as many aspects of the caller's situation as available and get as complete a picture as possible before making the initial call to the person needing the advice. The Dementia Advice nurses then complete the assessment and provide advice in one or more conversations with the caller. They also make referrals to longer-term support and complete the required documentation.
- Since the formal provincial launch on May 30, 2016, the Dementia Advice nurses have had 1053 conversations with caregivers and people with dementia! If you consider that one conversation very likely impacts least 2 people (the caregiver and the person with dementia, if not also other family members and friends), over 2000 Albertans have benefited from the advice and wisdom of the Dementia Advice nurses since last May alone!



## Did You Know?

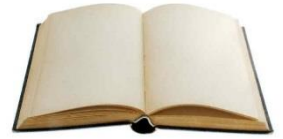
- Of users of Dementia Advice, the median age of the people with dementia is 79 and the median age of the caregivers is 59
- Of users of Dementia Advice, 63% of the people with dementia and 73% of the caregivers are women
- Most Albertans called Health Link with their questions and concerns about dementia around 10 am and 2 pm

## What Users of Dementia Advice Are Saying

*"I can't begin to express the difference you've made for our family. We had appealed to two different GPs to help, to no avail. It was when a colleague told me about your services in late spring and I made contact with you that we finally had a glimmer of hope...you've lifted an enormous weight from our shoulders and helped us find a sense of peace."*



## A Dementia Advice Story: A Standing Submission to the Dementia Advice Bulletin by a Dementia Advice Nurse



**A familiar referral was made to the Dementia Advice nurses from a frontline Health Link nurse:** “Please call back as caller is very stressed.” A Dementia Advice nurse called him to follow up and the first words out of his mouth were, “I need help!”

7 years ago, a generous man invited a friend in need to stay with him and his family. That man has been the friend’s caregiver since. And the friend has received a diagnosis of dementia. The caregiver admitted to have very little knowledge about dementia, or of how to ‘deal’ with the changes dementia brings to someone with the condition.

The caregiver described that his friend had soiled the carpet many times, and that he was ruining mattresses due to incontinence, that he often “trashed” his room in rage. The caregiver feared leaving his friend along because dizzy spells often caused him to fall.

The situation was understandably causing the caregiver a tremendous amount of stress and exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, and financial burden to him and his family. He was also managing his own diabetes.

The Dementia Advice nurse was able to offer him some techniques in how to approach his friend, offered phone numbers for community emergency services, Caregiver’s Alberta, and a phone number for a senior’s assessment clinic.

In the 2 weeks following the conversation with Dementia Advice, the friend’s behaviors had escalated and worsened to the point that the caregiver and his family felt unsafe. The caregiver was able to get help through community emergency services, who initiated admission to the hospital where the friend is remaining until safer placement for his care can be found.

This caregiver states he feels remorse and guilt, wishing he could have done more for his good friend. These are common feelings for the caregiver when they are faced with such difficult circumstances. The Dementia Advice team pointed out he had taken good care of his friend when he was in need. The caregiver mentioned that the attending physician caring for his friend now in the hospital had told him the same thing.

It is so rewarding to witness first-hand how our team truly is making a difference in caring for the caregivers taking care of dementia patients. Our callers are the heroes – taking care of a loved one with dementia is not for the faint of heart.

**We as a team are privileged to take care of the caregivers.**

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More information about Dementia Advice through Health Link, and promotional materials, can be found on AHS’ external website at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/scns/Page12938.aspx>

(or search ‘Dementia Advice’ from the AHS website)

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