

SAGE DEMENTIA CONSULTING

A 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Serving Alameda and Contra Costa counties

Supporting family members and professionals who care for individuals living with dementia with education on person-centered care.

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(925) 788-2640; SageDementiaConsulting.org



Year-End Reflections

As we bring this year to a close at Sage Dementia Consulting, I want to take a moment to honor the compassion and steady support you offer to those living with dementia. Whether you are a care partner, clinician, family member, or a community member with a heart for helping, your commitment makes a difference in the lives of the people we serve. Winter invites us to pause and reflect, and I'm deeply grateful for all we've accomplished together.

This season can bring unique challenges—shorter days, shifting routines, and the weight of holiday emotions—but time and again, I see remarkable creativity, patience, and resilience in how our community shows up. Your willingness to adapt, to offer comfort, and to remain present does not go unnoticed.

To our care partners, volunteers, and donors: thank you for your unwavering dedication and belief in our mission. Your support is at the heart of our progress and impact, helping us expand resources, deepen education, and strengthen the connections that matter most.

Wishing you a peaceful season filled with warmth, connection, and moments of calm. ■

Warmly,
Gia



GIA BARSELL, CDP
Chief Executive Officer
Sage Dementia Consulting



Preparing for the Holidays

The holidays can be a joyful time filled with family, traditions, and connection. For families caring for a person living with dementia, however, the season can also bring unique challenges. Changes in routine, large gatherings, and noisy environments may lead to confusion, fatigue, or distress for the person living with dementia. Preparing early can help ensure a calmer and more meaningful holiday experience for everyone involved.

Set Realistic Expectations: Focus on connection, not perfection. Traditions may need to be adjusted or simplified. Shorter visits, smaller gatherings, or quieter celebrations can help the person with dementia feel more comfortable.

Prepare Visitors: Let guests know what to expect such as changes in memory or behavior. Offer gentle reminders about how to engage: speak slowly, use the person's name, and avoid correcting or quizzing them.

Keep Routines: Familiar routines help reduce anxiety. Keep mealtimes, rest periods, and medication schedules consistent whenever possible. If traveling, bring familiar items such as a favorite blanket or photo to create a sense of comfort.



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Create a Calm Environment:

Minimize overstimulation by reducing background noise, dimming harsh lights, and providing a quiet space for breaks. Encourage calm, simple activities like listening to music, looking at old photos, holiday lights, or sharing stories.

Include the Person Living with Dementia: Even small gestures of inclusion- helping set the table, folding napkins, or singing along to carols- can help the person feel valued and connected. By planning ahead and setting compassionate expectations, families can create meaningful holiday moments that honor both the joy of the season and the needs of their loved one living with dementia. ■



Did You Know ...

FACTS ABOUT THE DEMENTIA
CAREGIVER EXPERIENCE

Dementia specialists and care professionals see every day the deep love and commitment that family caregivers show for their loved ones living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. These caregivers—more than 11 million across the United States—form the invisible backbone of dementia care. Their tireless efforts make it possible for individuals with dementia to live with comfort, dignity, and connection, even as the disease profoundly alters daily life.

But this devotion often comes at an enormous personal cost. **In 2023 alone, caregivers provided more than 18.4 billion hours of unpaid care—work valued at nearly \$350 billion.** On average, each caregiver spent over \$12,000 of their own money annually to cover medical expenses, home modifications, and basic living needs. Many families find themselves cutting back on retirement savings, postponing healthcare, or even reducing the amount of food they buy—just to sustain care.

Families shoulder about 70 percent of the total lifetime cost of dementia care, whether through direct out-of-pocket expenses or the countless unpaid hours devoted to caregiving. For the 41 percent of caregivers living on household incomes of \$50,000 or less, this financial pressure can be overwhelming.

These realities point to an urgent truth: caregivers need and deserve more support. Public policies must recognize the essential role of family caregivers and provide meaningful financial relief, access to respite services, and flexible workplace protections. Supporting caregivers is not only an act of compassion—it is a critical investment in the health and stability of millions of families and in the sustainability of the healthcare system.

Caregivers give everything of themselves so that their loved ones may live with dignity. It is time for society—and lawmakers—to stand beside them with the same dedication and care they so freely give. ■

Welcome, Diane Farthing!

Diane is a National Board Certified Health Educator who has worked with both adults and adolescents in a variety of capacities over the course of her long professional career. She's passionate that our elderly and those who care for them have the quality of life they deserve. Her goal is to advance the understanding of dementia and care strategies that promote dignity, independence, and comfort. Diane is currently pursuing the training and certifications to become a dementia specialist. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, reading, and being with her grandchildren.

We are excited to welcome Diane and her enthusiasm for promoting dementia awareness through education and support! ■



How Dementia Affects Driving Abilities and Safety

Driving is a complex task that depends on the coordination of cognitive, physical, visual, auditory, and visuospatial abilities. For people living with dementia, brain changes gradually weaken the skills needed for safe driving—often before family members notice clear signs. Understanding these effects helps families make informed, respectful decisions that balance independence with safety. In the early stages of dementia, some individuals may still drive safely with regular monitoring, medical guidance, and periodic evaluation.

Dementia affects several cognitive domains tied to driving. **Memory loss** can make it difficult to recall routes, follow directions, or remember the purpose of a trip. Over time, a driver may become disoriented in familiar neighborhoods or forget how to operate the vehicle.

Attention and concentration also decline. Safe driving requires continuous monitoring of mirrors, lane position, pedestrians, traffic signals, and surrounding vehicles. Dementia reduces the ability to divide attention, shift focus, and maintain concentration, leading to delayed reactions, missed signs, drifting between lanes, or difficulty navigating complex environments.

Judgment and decision-making are also affected. Tasks such as unprotected left turns, merging, or navigating busy intersections demand quick, accurate assessments. Dementia interferes with this process, causing hesitation when decisiveness is needed or prompting unsafe choices during fast-changing traffic conditions.

Slower processing speed and reaction time mean drivers may not respond quickly enough when the unexpected occurs. Emotional or behavioral changes—such as anxiety, irritability, or becoming overwhelmed—can further complicate driving. Some individuals also lose insight into their limitations, believing they are safe drivers despite evidence to the contrary.

As these changes progress, driving becomes increasingly unpredictable and unsafe. Families, however, do not need to navigate this uncertainty alone.

Experts at the Driver Cognitive Assessment Center help drivers and families make informed decisions through an objective, science-based evaluation process. A two-part assessment includes an in-office cognitive evaluation and a functional on-road assessment in a dual-control vehicle. Together, these results provide clear, accurate, and fair information—helping families understand current driving abilities and plan next steps with confidence and compassion. ■

Driver Cognitive Assessment Center
925-249-5947; dcacbayarea.com



Where the Wrong Order Is Just Right

The Restaurant of **Mistaken Orders** is a unique pop-up dining experience in Japan where all servers are individuals living with dementia. True to its name, orders may arrive differently than expected—but that's part of the experience. Instead of focusing on accuracy, the restaurant emphasizes empathy, patience, and connection. It challenges common assumptions about dementia by showing that those affected are still capable of contributing meaningfully and joyfully. Guests are encouraged to embrace unpredictability and enjoy the human connection behind each interaction. The project uses humor and warmth to foster greater understanding and compassion, reminding us that perfection isn't necessary for a meaningful experience. ■

Scan the QR code or search "Restaurant of Mistaken Orders" on YouTube to watch a 2-minute film.



Guest columnist **Melanie Henry** is the founder of the Bay Area-based Driver Cognitive Assessment Center



How We Fund Our Services

Sage Dementia Consulting is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization, tax ID 93-3481871. With the help of grants, fundraising events, and generous donations, we are able to offer our supportive services at low- or no-cost. Your contributions help us provide personalized consultations, educational workshops, and care-planning guidance for families navigating the complexities of caring for a loved one with dementia. Donations to Sage are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Ways that you can help us serve the community:

- Make a one-time or recurring donation at our website.
- Satisfy your retirement plan's required minimum distribution (RMD) by setting up a Qualified Charitable Distribution (talk to your financial advisor).
- Make a tribute/memorial donation. We can make the gift known to the family of your honoree.
- Attend our fundraising events (coming soon).
- Serve as a Sage volunteer (contact us for more info).
- Share information about our services with your family and friends.
- Invite us to speak at your workplace, place of worship, or organization to help raise awareness.



Meet the Team



Gia Barsell, CDP

Chief Executive Officer, Founder

giab@sagedementiaconsulting.org

- ▷ PAC™ Advanced Dementia Consultant and Trainer
- ▷ National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners
- ▷ Certified Montessori Dementia Care Professional®

Gia has been working with persons living with dementia and their families since 2013. As Dementia Services Manager at Hope Hospice, she educates families and clinical care staff on best practices for dementia care, including non-pharmacological approaches to responding to behavioral challenges. She also has extensive experience facilitating support groups for families of those with a dementia diagnosis. Gia's goal in founding Sage was to ensure that all community members have access to the guidance and support necessary to improve the quality of life for those living with dementia and their care partners.



Debbie Emerson, MS, CDP

Health Educator, Founding Partner

debbie@sagedementiaconsulting.org

- ▷ CARES® Dementia Specialist (Alzheimer's Association)
- ▷ National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners
- ▷ Certified Montessori Dementia Care Professional®

Debbie has worked in the Tri-Valley community as a health educator for over 35 years. Prior to joining Sage, she developed and managed Hope Hospice's Family Caregiver Education Series, a program designed to provide education, resources, and support to family care partners. She also co-developed Hope's Living with Dementia program, for which she provided training and support services to families and healthcare professionals. In addition to her professional training, Debbie's most valuable experience has come from her many years as a care partner to family members living with dementia.

Connect

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Sage is a 501(c)(3) non-profit,
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