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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A Year-End Message of Gratitude

As this year draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the many families and care partners navigating the challenges of dementia, and the meaningful difference that education and compassionate support can make along the way.

At Sage Dementia Consulting, we make the dementia journey less overwhelming by providing families and care partners with the guidance and support they need.

- As you consider your year-end charitable giving, I hope you'll consider making a gift to Sage. **Your generosity helps us:**
- Provide education and practical tools that empower families and care partners.
- Offer support groups that foster connection, understanding, and encouragement.
- Ensure valuable resources and personalized guidance are accessible to those who need them most.

Every gift, regardless of size, makes a difference. Together, we can build a more informed, connected, and compassionate dementia care community. ■



GIA BARSELL, CDP
Chief Executive Officer
Sage Dementia Consulting



Creating Moments of Connection

Simple ways to adapt holiday traditions and help loved ones living with dementia feel included and connected.

The holidays are filled with traditions, memories, and opportunities for connection. For someone living with dementia, however, large gatherings, changes in routine, and too much stimulation can sometimes feel overwhelming. The stress from such a scenario could cause or worsen irritability, resistance to care, or other undesirable behaviors in a person with dementia.

Keep in mind that meaningful holiday experiences don't have to be elaborate. Often, the simplest moments bring the greatest joy.

Consider including your loved one in familiar traditions in ways that reflect their current abilities and comfort level. Listening to favorite holiday music, looking through family photographs, decorating cookies, folding festive napkins, or arranging holiday decorations can all create opportunities for connection and a sense of purpose.

Remember that participation doesn't have to look the way it once did. Someone who once prepared the entire holiday meal might now enjoy stirring ingredients, setting the table, or simply being present as others cook. What matters most is feeling included and valued.

The environment matters, too. Smaller gatherings, quieter spaces, familiar surroundings, and opportunities for rest can help make celebrations more comfortable and enjoyable.

Above all, focus less on recreating holidays of the past and more on finding joy in the moments you share today.

Connection isn't about what someone remembers. It's about how we help them feel in the moment. ■



When Everyday Care Becomes a Challenge

Strategies to reduce resistance and ease holiday stress for people living with dementia.

For someone living with dementia, everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, eating, or taking medication can sometimes become a source of frustration or distress. This is often referred to as *resistance to care*. A person may refuse assistance, become upset, or resist activities they once managed independently. These reactions are not necessarily intentional. They may stem from confusion, fear, physical discomfort, difficulty understanding what is being asked, or a desire to maintain independence.

During the busy holiday season, changes in routine, added stimulation, and heightened emotions can make these challenges even more pronounced. A few simple strategies can help reduce frustration and create a calmer, more supportive experience for both you and your loved one.

Avoid power struggles. Remember that you cannot force someone to cooperate. A gentle, patient approach is often more effective than insisting.

Keep communication simple. Don't assume that explaining why something needs to be done will lead to cooperation. Use short, reassuring phrases and allow time for a response.

Look for the underlying cause. Resistance may stem from fear, confusion, discomfort, fatigue, or feeling overwhelmed. Understanding the reason can help you respond more effectively.

Offer comfort and reassurance. A calm voice, familiar routine, and supportive presence can help your loved one feel safe.

Provide choices when possible. Simple options, such as choosing between two outfits, can help preserve a sense of independence and control.

Allow extra time and flexibility. If an activity becomes stressful, take a break and try again later when possible. Not everything needs to happen on a strict schedule.

Above all, remember that connection matters more than completing every task exactly as planned. A little patience, flexibility, and understanding can go a long way toward making the holidays more peaceful for everyone. ■

Self-Care Reminder

This holiday season, give yourself permission to simplify. Connection matters more than tradition.





Emergency Room Visits: Being an Advocate

How preparation, communication, and advocacy can help make ER visits less stressful for loved ones living with dementia.

A visit to the emergency room can be especially stressful for someone living with dementia. Unfamiliar surroundings, noise, bright lights, and medical procedures can heighten confusion, fear, and anxiety. As a care partner, you play an important role in helping medical professionals understand your loved one's unique needs.

Being prepared can make a difference. Bring an up-to-date medication list, relevant medical history, and information about your loved one's usual cognitive abilities and communication needs. Share what helps them feel calm and secure, ask to remain by their side whenever possible, and encourage staff to explain procedures slowly and clearly.

Most importantly, alert medical staff to any sudden changes in thinking, awareness, or behavior. These changes may signal an underlying medical condition, such as an infection or delirium, rather than the progression of dementia.

There's encouraging news: California hospitals are increasingly embracing geriatric emergency care programs designed to better meet the needs of older adults. These programs may include specially trained staff, quieter environments, screening for dementia and delirium, and more individualized care. Hospitals such as Stanford, UC Davis, and select Kaiser Permanente locations have received recognition for their age-friendly emergency care.

When planning ahead, consider asking whether your local hospital has an accredited geriatric emergency department. In an emergency, however, never delay necessary treatment to reach a particular facility.

Remember: You know your loved one best. Your knowledge, presence, and advocacy can make a meaningful difference in their emergency room experience. ■



Navigating Grief During the Holidays

Honoring feelings of loss while finding new meaning in holiday traditions.

The holidays can be especially emotional for families caring for someone living with dementia. Traditions that once brought joy may now feel different, and changes in a loved one's memory, abilities, or personality can create a deep sense of loss. This is known as anticipatory grief, which can feel especially intense when family gatherings and celebrations highlight how much has changed. While others may be focused on joy and togetherness, you may be grieving someone who is still here but changing in ways that are difficult to accept. Memories of holidays past can bring sadness, fear, and longing for the way things used to be.

Give yourself permission to experience the holidays differently this year. Let go of expectations and choose the traditions that feel meaningful, while setting aside those that feel overwhelming. Most importantly, cherish the time you have together without expecting every moment to be perfect. ■

The Connection Between Hearing Loss and Dementia

How untreated hearing loss may affect cognitive health, and why early detection and treatment could help protect your brain as you age.

You may have heard that hearing loss has been linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline. But what do your ears have to do with your brain? As it turns out, quite a lot! Understanding the connection is important.

Hearing loss increases dramatically with age. Globally, more than half of people over age 60 are estimated to have hearing loss severe enough to require hearing aids. Research has found a strong association between hearing loss and dementia. One study from the National Institutes of Health found that using hearing aids reduced the rate of cognitive decline in higher risk older adults by nearly 50%. More research is needed, but treating hearing loss may be an effective way to reduce dementia risk.

The Connection

Our outer ears collect sounds and send them to the brain to interpret and give them meaning. We don't just hear a siren—our brain identifies what that sound is, and based on our experiences and expectations, knows how to respond. In other words, we "hear" with the ears, but we understand with the brain.

> **We hear with the ears, but we understand with the brain.**

There are several theories that help explain how untreated hearing loss may affect brain health:

Use It or Lose It

Our brains are constantly working to process the sounds around us. When hearing declines, the brain receives less auditory information to interpret and process. Over time, areas of the brain responsible for processing sound may become less stimulated.

This is sometimes described as the use-it-or-lose-it theory. Just as muscles can weaken when they aren't used regularly, certain brain pathways may become less active when they receive less stimulation. Reduced stimulation and changes in brain activity may contribute to cognitive decline over time.

Increased Cognitive Load

When someone has hearing loss, understanding speech often requires significantly more mental effort. The brain must work harder to fill in missing words, interpret sounds, and make sense of conversations.

This extra effort can take resources away from other cognitive functions, including memory, attention, and thinking. Essentially, the brain is working overtime just to keep up with everyday conversations.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

One of the most important connections between hearing loss and dementia may be social isolation. People with untreated hearing loss may begin avoiding conversations, family gatherings, restaurants, and other social activities because communicating becomes frustrating or exhausting. They may feel embarrassed about asking others to repeat themselves



or worry about misunderstanding what is being said.

Over time, this can lead to loneliness and reduced social engagement. Social interaction helps keep the brain active through conversation, problem-solving, memory, and emotional connection. When those interactions decrease, the brain may lose some of the stimulation that helps support cognitive health.

The bottom line: Everyone over 50 should have their hearing tested and, if needed, wear hearing aids. We know—it's not pleasant. But the potential benefits for your brain, social, and physical health are well worth it.

And don't wait. Once dementia has developed, learning to use hearing aids can be much more difficult. The time to address your hearing health is sooner rather than later. ■



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.

CLICK TO DONATE

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®

With nearly 15 years of experience in dementia care, Gia is dedicated to helping individuals and families navigate the challenges of living with dementia. Her expertise spans caregiver education, practical care strategies, and family support. She founded Sage Dementia Consulting to empower care partners with the knowledge, resources, and compassionate guidance they need to enhance quality of life.



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®

With more than 35 years of experience as a health educator, Debbie brings a wealth of knowledge to supporting families affected by dementia. Her background includes developing caregiver education programs, providing training to healthcare professionals, and connecting families with resources.



Diane Farthing

Health Educator

diane@sagedementiaconsulting.org

- CARES® Dementia Specialist (Alzheimer's Association)

Diane is a National Board Certified Health Educator with extensive experience working with adults and adolescents. She is passionate about improving quality of life for older adults and their care partners through dementia education and care strategies that promote dignity, independence, and comfort.

Connect

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Sage is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax ID 93-3481871.

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