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Feeling Stressed from Caregiving? You Can Adapt Through Mindful Self-Compassion

There's no escaping stress. We all experience it throughout our lives, and the question is not how to avoid it but how to adjust and adapt to it.

For Dr. Michael McIntyre, keynote presenter at the Alzheimer Society's upcoming Care4u family conference, the key to better health and well-being in the face of life's stressors is mindful self-compassion. He'll speak on this topic at the October 28th event, which takes place at the Canadian Mennonite University.

Dr. McIntyre spent years teaching psychology at the University of Winnipeg and founded the Functional Neuroimaging Program at Canada's National Research Council. Currently he is the research program leader for the Compassion Project at the St. Boniface Research Centre, where he both studies mindful self-compassion and delivers courses on the topic.

He describes mindfulness as the ability to pay full and complete attention to all aspects of one's life circumstances, and



Dr. Michael McIntyre

self-compassion as a particular approach to stressful and painful situations.

[See "Stressed" on back...](#)

Cup of Java Comes with Snickerdoodles at Elaine Butler's Coffee Break® Event

Elaine Butler wasn't sure how many guests to expect at her first Coffee Break® event, so she baked 500 cookies just to be safe.

While she may have had a few leftovers, attendance was excellent and her social circle has been more than generous, helping her to raise \$2,165 for the Alzheimer Society since she began hosting Coffee Break gatherings in 2014.

"It's not a big commitment to ask of people," she says of the fundraiser, which involves simply collecting donations while hosting a group for treats and beverages. "It's really just, 'Come for coffee.' It's a social thing, and it's easy. It's easy to organize and it's easy to attend."

Each fall the common room in Elaine's Brandon condo building fills with supportive coffee-enthusiasts: friends, neighbours and her fellow members of the United Church women's group and the ladies' auxiliary.

[See "Snickerdoodles" next page...](#)



Elaine Butler, Coffee Break® event host.

"Snickerdoodles" continued from page 1...

Visitors know that the Alzheimer Society has been close to Elaine's heart since her daughter Shelley was diagnosed with early onset dementia at age 53. The five years since have been a difficult road for their family.

Which One is the Patient?

"The first day I took Shelley to the care home, the charge nurse looked at us and said, 'Which one is the patient?'" Elaine recalls. "I thought, I'm the one with the white hair. I'm the one who's 84 and would fit in here, not Shelley. It's not supposed to be this way."

Their journey was made easier by help from the Alzheimer Society's Westman

office, which happens to be located on the main floor of Elaine's building. Elaine and Shelley both benefited from having staff close by to answer questions and provide a listening ear. Shelley also took part in one of the Society's programs, which offered recreational and educational activities for participants.

"Sometimes they had a volunteer come in and show slides of her travels, and that volunteer was me," Elaine says. "My husband and I have travelled a lot. So I would make DVDs of our trips and go in and show the pictures, which everyone seemed to enjoy."

Elaine is looking forward to hosting her fourth Coffee Break event on September 20. She's getting the word out to her friends and dusting off her famous snickerdoodle cookie recipe.

"Shelley has had tremendous support from the Alzheimer Society," Elaine says. "This is one small and easy way of paying back what she received."

COMING UP!

Living with Dementia: First Steps

Saturday, Sept. 23, Nov. 18 & Dec. 2, 9 am to 12 pm
Windsor Park United Church, 1062 Autumnwood Dr., Winnipeg

Saturday, Oct. 21, 9 am to 3:30 pm
150 McTavish Ave. E., Brandon

Family Education: Next Steps

Experience Dementia

Wednesday, Sept. 13, 7 to 8:30 pm
River Ridge II Retirement Residence, 2701 Scotia St., Winnipeg

Patient and Family Engagement in Patient Safety

Thursday, Oct. 12, 7 to 8:30 pm
Riverwood Square, 1778 Pembina Hwy., Winnipeg

Maintaining Physical and Social Engagement

Wednesday, November 8, 7 to 8:30 pm
The Waverley & Rosewood Retirement Community
by Revera, 857 Wilkes Ave., Winnipeg

Webinar: What Matters Most

Thursday, Sept. 28, 7 to 8:15 pm
Presented by: Heather Ann Dixon, Legal Counsel

Telehealth Sessions (for regional communities only)

Join us from 6:30 to 8 pm on the following dates:

- Thursday, Oct. 19: Dementia Basics
- Thursday, Nov. 16: Understanding the Person

To register online, visit alzheimer.mb.ca
or call 204-943-6622 or 1-800-378-6699
for more information.



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Host a Coffee Break® event

during September or October in support of people affected by dementia. Register online today at alzheimer.mb.ca

Join us for NATIONAL COFFEE BREAK DAY!

Sept. 21st, 7 to 10:30 am
Revera Coffee Break
The Maples PCH (500 Mandalay Dr.)

text **COFFEE** to **45678** to donate \$5 to the Alzheimer Society.

September



World Alzheimer's Month

Remember Me

Early diagnosis means I can live well for longer.



Two out of every three people globally believe there is little or no understanding of dementia in their countries.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 6:30 to 10:30 pm
CLUB REGENT EVENT CENTRE
REGISTRATION: \$30

- Option to collect pledges
- Register as a team or individual

Register online at alzheimer.mb.ca
or call 204-943-6622

Minds in Motion®

The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's Minds in Motion® program is a two-hour, eight-week program that combines physical activity, socialization and mental stimulation for people living with early to moderate symptoms of dementia to attend with a family member or community friend.

Fall Minds in Motion® sessions will run at six Winnipeg locations and in Gimli, Portage la Prairie, Altona and Morden. For information on times and locations, visit alzheimer.mb.ca.

Thinking Again About Early Diagnosis

If you think a memory problem is the only sign of dementia, think again.

While issues with memory are usually present, a person with dementia may also become disoriented easily, getting lost when out for a walk around the block. They may also show poor judgement, like wearing a heavy coat on a hot day. Someone who was always easy-going and fun may become suspicious and confused.

And the memory problems that do exist? Well, let's just say that, for people with dementia, it's more than just forgetting where they put the car keys. The ability to do everyday tasks – making a cup of tea, putting the garbage out – may be affected. They may think the hair blower belongs in the fridge and the eggs in the oven.

What To Do Next

If you notice that someone you care about is showing signs of dementia, the Alzheimer Society can help you with the next steps,

which involve getting a diagnosis. That may sound daunting, but the Society offers the *Getting a Diagnosis Toolkit* that will help you prepare for a conversation with your doctor or any other health care provider you reach out to.

"Our Toolkit provides information about the warning signs and asks you to complete the *Preparing for Your Doctor's Visit* form, which helps you note details about the symptoms that are present," says Norma Kirkby, the Society's Program Director.

Once you see your doctor, appointments with other health care professions may be made, so the process could take several weeks or months. The person's physical and mental health will be examined, and certain tests, such as a CT (computerized tomography) and an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) may be ordered.

"It's important to go through all the testing because it's possible that the symptoms of



dementia are caused by another condition, such as depression, drug interactions or an infection," explains Norma "These things must be ruled out before a dementia diagnosis can be made."

Finding out that the diagnosis is dementia can be scary, but knowing can help the person and their family to plan for the future.

[Click here to download the *Getting a Diagnosis Toolkit*](#)

International Conference Reveals Great Strides in Research

– Nalini Sen, Director, Alzheimer Society Research Program

I had the opportunity to attend this year's annual Alzheimer's Association International Conference (AAIC) in London, UK. This conference brings together some of the world's leading researchers and clinicians in dementia treatment, detection and prevention. And with a record number of presentations – 3,300 in all – I have to admit, I was awestruck. Here are a few takeaways I would like to share with you:

Stress Can Age Your Brain

How we manage stress is even more important than was previously thought. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin studied 1,320 people who had experienced stressful events like losing a job, getting a divorce or grieving the death of a family member. What did they find? A single stressful experience can age your brain by four years! Their findings reaffirm that healthy lifestyle habits matter.

Your Brain Needs a Good Night Rest

Getting good sleep is as important as getting enough sleep. In a 516-person study, researchers from Wheaton College found greater instances of beta amyloid deposits in the brains of those with sleep disordered breathing and noticed that these deposits accumulated faster over time. Sleep disordered breathing is common. It includes hypopnea (under breathing) and apnea (not breathing) during sleep. While researchers need to do more investigative work, if we can

better treat these sleep disorders, we may be able to reduce the risk of dementia or possibly delay the progression of the disease where it has already occurred.

Other presentations at AAIC reported on advancements in diagnosing dementia, which is a complicated and often a long process:

PET Brain Scans Can Improve Diagnosis

Researchers from Sweden reported a 68 per cent increase in dementia diagnoses when PET brain scans were used in a small test sample of 135 people with memory problems. PET scans help identify whether amyloid plaques, the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease, are present in the brain. It does this by injecting a special dye with radioactive tracers into the arm, which is then and absorbed by the organs and tissues.

Steps Closer to a Dementia Blood Test

In another study, Washington University researchers were able to measure amyloid



beta in the cerebrospinal fluid (a fluid in the brain) with 89 per cent accuracy. Amyloid beta and tau protein, which accumulate in the brain, are triggers for Alzheimer's disease. While more study is needed, a blood test for dementia may soon become available. This kind of test could identify those at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease even years before symptoms appear.

One thing was clear at this year's AAIC conference: researchers around the world are working diligently to find a cure and identify new ways of diagnosing dementia earlier. And while they continue their search, there is now even more evidence that we can take steps to reduce our risk of developing dementia by living a healthier lifestyle.

[Click here to learn more about what you can do to keep your brain healthy.](#)

QUESTION: My family member has dementia and often becomes restless and anxious. Can you give me ideas on what to do when this happens?

Ask an Expert

When trying to understand a person with dementia's behaviour, it's good to remember that all words, gestures and actions are a form of communication and have meaning. Typically, the person is trying to communicate their response to something that is happening within them or around them.

Possible internal causes for the reactive behaviour:

- boredom
- an upsetting memory
- tiredness
- hunger
- pain

Things happening in the environment that can trigger reactive behaviour:

- too much activity
- a task that is too difficult
- encountering another person who is angry or impatient
- being unable to understand the communications of others

STEPS TO HELP CALM THE PERSON

Don't get caught up in their distress:

Acknowledge their feelings – even if you don't understand why the person is reacting the way they are. Even if you feel frustrated, don't let an impatient tone colour your voice and movements. Instead, use simple phrases and speak in a gentle manner. Don't try to convince the person of your point of view, as it may be confusing. Let your facial expression and body posture communicate that you'll help them work things out.

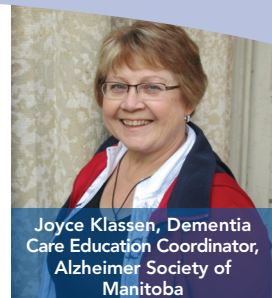
Take a look at the environment around the person:

Is there a noise that you could eliminate? A sharp shadow that could be buffered by closing a blind? Is the person tugging at their clothing, indicating discomfort or the need to use the washroom? Is too much being expected of the person at that moment regarding a task to be completed? Often, the solution to the situation can be found by simply removing an irritant.

Think about what calmed the person throughout their life and use it to help them now:

Does the person enjoy music, singing and movement? Do they like going for walk? Having a cup of tea? By using these strategies, you can change the focus of attention so that the thing that caused the distress will be forgotten. You can also take the person outdoors to watch the animals and view the natural world, which can refocus the mind and energy. Quietly sharing the moment can be reassuring for an anxious person.

To support a person with dementia when they are anxious, observe the situation to learn what may be the cause, remove or change things that may be contributing to the person's unease and choose solutions that are centred on the person. Your actions will be a caring gift to them.



Joyce Klassen, Dementia Care Education Coordinator, Alzheimer Society of Manitoba

Alzheimer Society Named as "Fifth Child"

Elizabeth and John Zandstra have four children, but they always planned to split their estate five ways: a portion for each adult child and one for the charities that mean the most to them.

Elizabeth playfully nicknames the estate the "fifth child," and she's already begun to disburse the money to a chosen list of worthy causes.

The Alzheimer Society is among them, and it's a cause that hits particularly close to home. About six years ago, John was diagnosed with vascular dementia. Elizabeth took full advantage of the Society's programs and services while she cared for John at home, as well as after his transition to a nearby care home.

"I do feel blessed because my husband is still very sweet – he's never grouchy," she says. "But when you are looking

after someone, you have to be 24 hours on your toes."

John owned and ran a successful engineering firm, but dementia began to impact his daily function after he retired. Elizabeth became the sole manager of the couple's business and personal assets. Her accountant advised her that giving to charity out of their estate while she was still living would have considerable tax benefits and give her the opportunity to see firsthand the good her donations would do. Knowing that John had always wanted to share their estate with their favourite charities, Elizabeth followed the advice. She now receives regular calls, cards and letters from the grateful recipients of her donations.

"One lady phoned me to say thank you and was so moved she almost cried," Elizabeth says.

Her daughter and Power of Attorney, Marietta, says that she and her siblings are tremendously supportive of their parents' decision. Marietta helped her

mom with setting up the estate donations, which involved meetings with a lawyer, financial planner and accountant.

"The biggest piece I would recommend for anyone thinking of doing it this way, is you need to talk to an accountant to make sure that your process of liquidating assets fits your financial picture," she says.

"In my parents' case, this is something that reduces their tax rate and makes their money work better for charities and for themselves."

Elizabeth and John have always modelled to their children the value of generosity, and the creation of a "fifth child" through their estate continues that tradition.

As Elizabeth puts it, "We are not in the world to hold it all to ourselves."



Elizabeth Zandstra

For more information about making a donation through your estate, or about other ways to give, call Wendy or Lorraine at 204-943-6622.

CEO Message

Supporting Manitobans with Dementia to Live at Home

As the province's leading advocate for people with dementia and their families, the Alzheimer Society keeps a watchful eye on new research concerning those we represent. We then take action to inform the community and initiate steps to encourage change.

Over the summer, a study called *Seniors in Transition* was released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It focusses on understanding the care paths of seniors over time and through the health care system.

A key finding is that, nationally, over one fifth of individuals in Canadian long term care facilities could, with appropriate supports, still be living in their own homes. The Manitoba figure was the highest of the six provinces and one territory studied: a third of people living in personal care homes were deemed – based on test results – to be potentially capable of living in the community.

To start to address this issue, the Society believes that efforts should focus on: adequate home care services; affordable and varied housing options; and caregiver

support. With these in place, people with dementia will have the opportunity to live as independently as possible in the community for as long as possible.

That's not to say that a variety of residential care facilities are not needed – they most certainly are! By 2038, it is projected that 40,700 Manitobans will have dementia. We must work to ensure that facilities are designed specifically to provide quality care and that staff members are trained to be compassionate care partners.

Keeping Caregivers Strong

Even though personal care homes are a vital part of the care continuum, many people – as revealed in the *Seniors in Transition* study – could be living for longer periods of time in more independent housing options. But let's face it: this could not happen without the dedication of care partners, whether they be family members or friends.

The Alzheimer Society is striving to keep caregivers strong by offering the First Link® program, which connects caregivers to support and education, as well as our Care4u® Family Conference and our



Wendy Schettler, CEO

Minds in Motion® program. Our Dementia Friendly Communities initiative encourages everyone to be aware and inclusive of people with dementia. We want every community to be welcoming and helpful. The goal is to ensure that people with dementia can enjoy a high quality of life wherever they live with the help of their care partners, home care services and other supports.

With the myriad of changes currently taking place in the health care system, there is uncertainty about how individuals with dementia and their families will be impacted. It's important to communicate with those leading the change. Let them know what's important to you and how the changes may affect you and your ability to help someone with dementia live with grace, dignity and purpose.

The Society pledges to do the same.

"Stressed" continued from page 1...

Responsibility to the Self

"What's called for in a circumstance often involves optimizing your responsibilities – familial, social, work and ethical – with responsibility to the self," Dr. McIntyre says. "You ask, 'How can I structure this situation in a way that's optimal to myself as well as to others?'"

Dr. McIntyre and his colleagues have conducted research with the health care workers who have taken their mindfulness seminars. They found that participants report reduced levels of stress and anxiety, along with increased levels of what the research team calls 'engagement' – positive responses to statements such as, "When I wake up each morning I'm looking forward to my day."

Other research on mindfulness-based stress reduction programs has shown improvements in participants' physical health. In one study, when people who took an eight-week program were given a flu shot, they were found to have more flu-fighting antibodies

than a group of individuals who had not taken the program.

Dr. McIntyre's presentation at the Care4u conference will include leading attendees through some of the practical stress-reduction exercises he uses in his courses. He expects that his past work with professional health care workers will resonate with those who are caring for loved ones with dementia.

"Some people get so immersed in health care and feel compelled to give, give, give, without asking the question, 'What do I need in order to be able to continue to give without self harm?' It's the same kind of question that a family caregiver needs to ask."

Dr. McIntyre will present in the morning on the basics of mindful self-compassion and in the afternoon on the role of gratitude in happiness and well-being. Thank you to keynote sponsor, Revera – The Waverley & Rosewood.



A conference for family and friends caring for a person with dementia

Saturday, October 28
Canadian Mennonite University,
500 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB

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Awards and Appreciation Evening
Thursday, September 14, 7 pm
Investors Group Cafeteria
447 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg
RSVP by September 11
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