

## Guest Editor's Introduction

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Delaware may be a small state, but it is home to some 19,000 people with Alzheimer's dementia and their caregivers. Mirroring global trends, Delaware anticipates an increase in the population of older adults in general – and in those with neurocognitive disorders in particular – during the foreseeable future. As the "First State" and as an attractive retirement destination, Delaware proactively attends to the health of its aging population. The articles collected in this special issue of the Delaware Journal of Public Health illustrates the State's commitment to identifying, treating, protecting and understanding individuals with dementia while supporting those who care for them.

The contributions to this issue are grouped into three sections. In the first, readers will learn about Delaware's public health initiatives to improve the lives of citizens affected by dementia, both those who are diagnosed and those who care for them. The State Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders is described, along with the subsequent services associated with Dementia Friendly Delaware and the Behavioral Health Consortium. The authors, Ms. Devlin and Ms. Garlick, participated in these developments and provide a thoroughly informed view of their planning and implementation. Next, Ms. Isaac discusses the value and impact of grass-roots advocacy efforts, illustrated with her family's own story and several additional poignant vignettes. She emphasizes the need for greater availability of skilled clinicians, increased dementia-care training for all our clinicians, improved access to long term care and public support of dementia care initiatives. Ms. Macklin, associated with the very active Delaware Valley Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, describes the role that the Alzheimer's Association and other advocacy organizations continue to play in educating the public and promoting federal legislative aid to the affected population. Dr. Martens and his colleagues then describe exciting advances in the understanding of dementia achieved by scientists at the University of Delaware, where a bold plan has recently been proposed for the establishment of a new "Delaware Center for Cognitive Aging Research." Dr. Adams and colleagues describe an innovative non-pharmacologic approach to enhancing cognitive function in patient-caregiver dyads whose safety and trust have been compromised by a common complication of dementia, impaired caregiver recognition. This section closes with an interview with Lieutenant Governor Bethany Hall-Long, who shares her thoughts about Delaware's commitment to caring for people who are cognitively impaired.

In the second section of this issue, experts representing various levels of dementia care describe important treatment elements and settings. A detailed and informative overview of current and upcoming diagnostic tests and pharmacologic treatments is offered by Drs. Bomasang-Layno and Bronsther. Ms. Eidschun and Ms. Ramage describe the world of home care and the complex decisions families face when choosing between home health care and residential care in long-term facilities, and their contribution is followed by a description of long-term care options in Delaware by Ms. Heiks. Patients, families, and clinicians who wish to understand the role that palliative care and hospice play in dementia care will find the article by Drs. Malhi, McElveen, and O'Donnell of great interest. This section ends with a devoted daughter's account of her

mother's care during her journey through successive levels of care from outpatient to inpatient and residential settings. Ms. Goonan's moving story offers important guidance to both families and clinicians.

Finally, the third section of this issue is devoted to a collection of resources for both clinician and non-clinician readers who wish to understand more about the prevention and treatment of dementia. Dr. Cohen and his colleagues provide a practical and comprehensive overview of evidence-based lifestyle choices and compensatory rehabilitative interventions to delay, prevent, or limit the symptoms of cognitive decline. Dr. Flexman offers additional detail about cognitive stimulation and describes resources available in Delaware for life-long learning. Dr. Stephens and her colleagues describe the special challenges faced by younger adults with dementia and their caregiving families. An instructive discussion of proactive and protective legal instruments is provided by Ms. Smith and Mr. Riley. The next article in this section is a lively discussion of the scams which face older adults, even those without cognitive impairment, and precautions to increase their safety, co-authored by Mr. Weldon, Delaware's Chief Special Investigator / Investment Protection, and Dr. Berlin. The section concludes with an interview with Dr. Patricia Curtin discussing the contribution to health care made by one of our state's precious specialist groups, the geriatricians.

Surveying the scope of this collection, one recognizes the devastating toll imposed on our population by neurocognitive disorders. Perhaps we will someday have medications to halt or reverse the diseases which impair cognition, but such a solution is most likely far in the future. For now, the success of our fight against dementia will require public advocacy, skilled clinical care, and legislative support to achieve widespread education, preventive improvements in lifestyle, early detection, state of the art treatment and optimal care in homes and facilities. The contributors to this special issue have provided many inspiring suggestions in each of these areas and I thank them for their dedication and creativity.

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