

Virtual Dementia Tour Provides Glimpse of Alzheimer's

- by Beth Garner -

Eyes, dimmed by age...unable to focus or see clearly.
Ears, incapable of discriminating voices from the constant droning of background noises and startling interruptions.
Fingers, stiffened by arthritis with the sense of touch further diminished in the fingertips.
Confusion.



These simple symptoms are enough to increase the anxiety and frustration levels of most healthy individuals let alone someone who is aging...let alone someone with a debilitating illness like Alzheimer's disease or dementia. How can caregivers and/or family members encourage loved ones to cope with the symptoms of their dementia? How can the caregivers themselves dealing with these same frustrations day after day learn to cope?

Nurses Available of Towson has embraced a new training known as the Virtual Dementia Tour by Second Wind Dreams which allows staff members to experience similar limitations suffered by those in their care. Pat Kloiber, Certified Senior Advisor and Manager of the Towson office of Nurses Available and a certified trainer by the Alzheimer's Association, decided to make this training available to staff and family members wishing to understand the debilitating effects of aging and Alzheimer's disease. She got the idea for this mind-opening training after a coworker described a similar educational experience offered by a nursing home caring for an aging parent. Much more than just a virtual experience, the Dementia Tour is an actual hands-on simulation in which each trainee must carry out a series of simple tasks hampered by situations and props meant to reproduce the effects of aging as well as the confusion of dementia.

Yes, it is easy to stuff a pillow into a pillow case or pair a few socks together. It's not so easy to do it while wearing goggles which are blurred and dimmed in a manner similar to macular degeneration. It's actually pretty difficult to match up and roll all those dark-colored socks together in a low-light environment when your fingers are taped together in ill-fitting gloves and filled with beans, leaving you virtually no tactile discrimination or joint mobility.

This training is mandatory for those caregivers of Nurses Available, who work with elderly clients diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. In addition, Kloiber has opened the training up to those family members of their clients who are searching for greater understanding. Caregivers who feel frustrated with the limitations of the disease can now experience them firsthand. After completing the Virtual Dementia Tour, the participants gain a unique perspective on Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Understanding the limitations is the key to good care.

Nurses Available, located at 744 Dulaney Valley Road, is a private-duty nursing agency serving the area since 1985. Medical and non-medical care can be provided from one to 24 hours a day. Care or companionship is provided in the home, hospital, assisted living or nursing facility at a very reasonable cost. For more information about the Virtual Dementia Tour or to learn more about the services provided by Nurses Available, please contact Pat Kloiber at 410-321-4466.