

## Pushing Back the Frontiers of Dementia

### *The Road Less Travelled to Mental Health in Old Age*

Dementia Awareness Week 2013 (16<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> of September) is Australia's response to World Alzheimer's Day on September 21<sup>st</sup>. This is a timely reminder that retirement villages and care facilities should vary the cognitive stimuli they provide their members. Dementia is an unfolding heartbreak we are only beginning to understand. Our task as carers is to grasp the loose ends, and try to pull them together as best we can. Dementia Awareness Week 2013 (<http://www.fightdementia.org.au/whats-on/Events.aspx>) is an opportunity to reflect on this, as we discover creative ways to push back the frontiers of dementia together.

### The Golden Rectangle

Senior wellness comprises the following pivot points (within the limitations of individual member's capabilities):

- ✓ A healthy, balanced diet
- ✓ Regular, moderate exercise
- ✓ Fresh stimulating ideas
- ✓ A socially active calendar

Ideally, cognitively challenging activities for seniors should address all these pressure points as they unfold. In addition, there is a need to rotate these activities, so that we stimulate older minds in many different ways. We recommend retirement villages and care facilities build their programs around these concepts. Here are four examples from some of our clients that build around social interaction, cognitive stimulation and group discussion.

### Theme 1 – A Healthy Balanced Diet

The best way to drive motivation levels down is to spoon-feed people. We all know that, but how often do we ask our senior citizens what they would like to eat?

- Invite a nutritionist to give a talk on a healthy, balanced [Mediterranean Diet](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mediterranean-diet/CL00011). (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mediterranean-diet/CL00011>)
- Invite comments from the floor. Make it controversial and involve everybody.
- Create working parties. Ask them to make suggestions for future menus.

- Review their ideas the following day with all present, and vote on them.
- Award token prizes to the winners, but reward all with a delicious lunch.

*This sample idea converts a routine topic into something that entices fresh thought.*

### **Theme 2 – Regular, Moderate Exercise**

Instead of asking members to attend a daily aerobics session, try creating a diversion that makes exercise a spontaneous event. Here is a great idea to try:

- Announce a walk about the facility to investigate the state of maintenance.
- Ask working groups to look for failed light bulbs, cracked windowpanes, etc.
- Ask each one to summarise their findings in a brief report to the main group.
- Meet monthly afterwards to review progress until everything is right again

*There are many other ways to maintain interest in the environment while exercising.*

### **Theme 3 – Fresh Stimulating Ideas**

We mentioned the road less travelled earlier. This was a reference to [M. Scott Peck's](#) book ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M. Scott Peck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._Scott_Peck)), in which he explores the attributes essential for fulfilled human life. Creativity is a response to unexpected events. Involve all members in a group debate.

- Invite them to attend a [learning program](#) (such as Hale & Fun, <http://haleandfun.com.au/>) on a topic of general interest (*well, it would hardly be a Company newsletter if I didn't squeeze in a little self-promotion*)
- Make sure this is interactive by encouraging contributions from everybody.
- Stimulate a discussion afterwards among members to elicit their feelings.
- Write these up on a flip chart. Leave it on the wall for several days.
- Wrap up with a closing address that summarises the learning points.

*This is an excellent way to help seniors remain cognitively active while having fun.*

The offerings of **Hale & Fun** contribute to this effort. We specialise in supporting Australian retirement homes and care facilities through [short education programs](http://haleandfun.com.au/more-course-offerings/) (<http://haleandfun.com.au/more-course-offerings/>) especially designed for senior citizens. These address the imperative to keep older minds active, while at the same time helping seniors enjoy retirement together.

#### **Theme 4 – A Socially Active Calendar**

The final stages of dementia involve complete withdrawal from society. Encouraging [social activities](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia-guide/pages/dementia-activities.aspx) (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia-guide/pages/dementia-activities.aspx>) keeps brains active, while helping sufferers feel motivated and happy. Develop a cycle of activities that stretches throughout the year. For example,

- Lay in a supply of coloured tissue paper and shiny baubles at Christmas.
- Demonstrate ways of making paper chains and other decorations.
- Divide the members into groups of two and three with specific tasks.
- Circulate among them to provide advice and words of encouragement.
- Decorate the spaces where they live on Christmas Eve. Oh what fun!

*Belonging to a warm community compensates for loneliness and counters isolation.*

### **Moving Towards the Future:**

#### **The Hale & Fun Dementia Awareness Cognitive Challenge**

One of the best ways to do just that is to remain cognitively active and our Company mascot, the Professor in the Hawaiian shirt has been working hard on just that.



**So are you ready for the Hale & Fun Cognitive Challenge?**



This year Dementia Awareness Week will run from Monday 16<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> of September and the theme is brain health, and you know what they say

**“The brain is a muscle and like any muscle it needs to be exercised!”**

The Professor has developed a number of cognitively challenging puzzles and activity sheets for you and your residents.

These will arrive each day during Dementia awareness week





Why not set up teams? Who can figure them out first- the residents or the staff?

Some of our clients have even incorporated their resident's friends and families into the fun to see who really is the smartest of them all!

For those of you eager to get started we have attached a special sneak preview activity sheet to this newsletter all about the exciting world of cryptozoology.

## Have Fun!

***Please feel free to pass the newsletter onto your colleagues or other interested parties or better yet get them to drop me a line at [Daniel@haleandfun.com.au](mailto:Daniel@haleandfun.com.au) and I will add them to the mailing list.***

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