

# What is the Difference Between Alzheimer's and Dementia?

By Suzy LaForge

Dementia is the 6th leading cause of death in the US. One in three seniors dies with dementia. It kills more than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.\* Yet many continue to be confused about the distinction between Alzheimer's and dementia. At Amazing Place, the only day program in Houston exclusively for adults with mild to moderate dementia, Sally Davis, RN, MSN, Health Services Director, comments that it's not unusual for "families to come in and be unclear what their loved one's diagnosis is and even know there are different types of dementia."

In fact, "dementia" is the umbrella term for a list of disorders (over 100) characterized by cognitive decline severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease is just one of the disorders, albeit the most common and representing 60-80% of dementia cases nationally. Understanding the type of dementia is important so that families understand what behavioral and cognitive changes to expect, how the disease typically progresses and even how treatments will differ.

Here are some of the most common dementias and ones often seen at Amazing Place:

**Alzheimer's Disease:** The leading cause of dementia, characterized by memory loss, confusion, difficulty communicating, anxiousness, and paranoia. Researchers believe the buildup in the brain of amyloid plaques and tau tangles causes the disease. Brain changes may begin decades before symptoms appear.

**Vascular Dementia:** Also known as "post-stroke dementia", the second most common cause of dementia and characterized by memory loss, impaired judgement, decreased planning ability, and loss of motivation. The location, size and number of brain injuries due to stroke will determine whether dementia will result and, if and how, memory and thinking will be affected.

**Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD):** Marked by behavioral and emotional changes while memory is preserved. The hallmark symptoms are decreased inhibition, apathy, decreased empathy, compulsive behaviors, and anxiety. FTD is caused by shrinkage of the frontal or temporal lobes of the brain.

**Lewy Body Dementia:** Characterized by sleep problems, memory problems, hallucinations, mood fluctuations, and gait disturbances. Lewy Body Dementia is caused by abnormal protein "bodies" that somehow appear in nerve cells and impair functioning.

**Mixed Dementia**—a combination of dementias, most commonly vascular and Alzheimer's, followed by Alzheimer's with Lewy Bodies.

Amazing Place encourages caregivers to obtain a specific diagnosis as early as they can. It helps families accept the changes they see in their loved one, whether it's memory, language, orientation, mood, reasoning or behavioral. Families also can start planning for the future, exploring treatment options, and building their community support network.

In addition to the dementia day program and multiple free caregiver support classes, Amazing Place also offers free presentations to the com-

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## Learn About Medicare Fraud

Elderly Texans are receiving harassing phone calls and personal visits from scam artists seeking to make a fraudulent dollar from Medicare. These predators offer seniors "free" durable medical equipment (DME) — such as knee braces and more — items that seniors neither want nor need. Often the senior never receives the DME and we all end up footing the bill for the cost to Medicare, which some experts estimate to be a staggering \$250 billion or more per year.

Now that the government is issuing new Medicare cards, scammers are emerging with a new scam; they are misrepresenting how to obtain new Medicare cards, often charging for this illegal "service" and stealing seniors' identities as well.

Learn how to protect, detect and prevent Medicare and healthcare fraud at a luncheon meeting of N4NN, Neighbors for Neighbors Network, on Tuesday, July 24, 11 a.m. at Genesis Restaurant, Chimney Rock at Bissonnet.

Speaker will be Jennifer Salazar, a Medicare Patrol Program Director for the Better Business Bureau Education Foundation. Her topic: "Don't Be a Victim! Stop Medicare Fraud before it happens!" A question and answer period will follow Ms. Salazar's talk.

Cost is \$15, including lunch, drink, tax and tip. To RSVP contact co-chair Wayne Dorris at wayne.dorris@earthlink.net or call (832) 998-6466.

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### Mended Hearts

Monday, July 16, Mended Hearts Chapter 362 met at 5:30 p.m. at the HBU Bradshaw Fitness Center, 7731 Southwest Freeway, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Rooms A, B, C. Meeting is free with parking, courtesy of HBU Bradshaw Fitness Center. Speaker for the evening was Mary Browne, Director of Chaplaincy at Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital and Association of Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisor.

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