

A Simpler Holiday Season When Your Loved One Has Dementia

By Marian O. Hodges, MD, MPH and Anne P. Hill, JD

The holidays can be a stressful time under the best of circumstances but when someone you love has dementia, the holidays can be especially nerve-racking. However, with a little flexibility and planning you can create a holiday for your family member who has dementia that will be enjoyable for both of you.

Here are three tips for a happier holiday:

1. Avoid holiday crowds with your family member who has dementia. This means every holiday crowd, especially the shopping crowds. When people have dementia, their brains are failing. One of the areas of the brain that fails is the frontal lobe, which normally filters out the distractions we encounter every day, thus letting us focus on what we need to do. When the frontal lobe is damaged, nothing is filtered out. People with dementia have no ability to shut out any distraction: every light, every decoration, every Christmas tree, every holiday carol, all the noise and crush of hundreds of people at the mall assaults their brains and quickly confuses and overwhelms them.

2. Keep your family member's routine as close to normal as possible. Help your family member who has dementia stick to the usual routine. Changes in routine are always distracting to people who have Alzheimer's disease and can cause a person with dementia to become more confused and sometimes agitated. Be sure your family member eats regular meals; keep the number of outings to a minimum; encourage family members who don't live with your loved one to visit in small groups, not all together. If possible, plan small holiday celebrations for your loved one where he or she lives, instead of large family



gatherings away from home. Remember, a large family gathering really is a holiday crowd and you should avoid holiday crowds!

3. Consider every event from the point of view of your family member who has disease or another dementia, even happy events can be terrifying. For example, one Christmas morning, when co-author Anne Hill visited her mother, who lived in a group home, she found her mother sobbing in the living room, and no one could explain why. Anne finally

understood that families of several residents had been arriving to take their family member home with them for a holiday celebration, but her mother believed that strangers were taking people away and she was afraid that someone was going to take her away, too.

As you consider how to celebrate the upcoming holidays with your family member who has dementia, think simple. Low key, quiet celebrations will be much more fun for your loved one, and that will be much more fun for you!

Oregonians: Step Up for Health Insurance by Dec. 15

The deadline to make sure your private health insurance continues this January is fast approaching. People have only 10 more days to enroll – by Dec. 15, 2014 – for their coverage to be effective Jan. 1, 2015.

Oregonians can go to HealthCare.gov to compare plans, apply for tax credits and other financial savings, and enroll in coverage.

As of Nov. 30, about 19,000 Oregonians had enrolled in 2015 individual private health insurance plans, according to preliminary data reported by insurance carriers. That represents about 9 percent of the total number of individuals who currently have coverage.

"People tend to wait until the last minute, but it's important that you don't wait too long. Even if you have an opportunity to renew your plan, we encourage you to visit HealthCare.gov and shop around," said Oregon Insurance Commissioner Laura Cali. "Your plan may have changed, and you may have different health or financial needs this year. Oregon's competitive market means you have lots of choices."

Licensed insurance agents can help you decide which plans might be best for you. To find an agent who can help you enroll in a plan, visit CoverOregon.com. You can also find in-person help over the next week at enrollment open houses. Visit CoverOregon.com for details and to pre-register.

The open enrollment period for people who buy their own health insurance runs from Nov. 15, 2014, through Feb. 15, 2015. Open enrollment is the one time during the year when you can change plans, change insurance companies, or choose to stay with the plan you have. HealthCare.gov is the only place for Oregonians to apply for tax credits and other financial savings. Oregonians who are covered through the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) are not required to re-enroll during this period. Their renewal dates are individual to them and they will receive a letter from the Oregon Health Authority when it is time for them to renew their coverage. When they receive the letter, they should take action right away.

'Oregon's competitive market means you have lots of choices'

The Insurance Division will collect enrollment information from carriers each week throughout 2015 open enrollment. Updated numbers will be posted each Thursday by close of business on the division's website at: <http://www.oregon.gov/DCBS/insurance/insurers/Pages/openenrollment-weeklyupdates.aspx>

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A family wage, and the benefits that go with it, not only strengthens families, but also allows our communities to become stronger, more cohesive, and more responsive to their citizens' needs.

Our family wage agenda reflects our commitment to people working in the building trades, and to workers everywhere. In this small way, we are doing our part to help people achieve the American Dream. This dream that workers can hold dear regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, creed, or religious beliefs.

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