

January 17, 2008  
Mary Johnson

I attended the Early Memory Loss Support Group, held from 1-3 at the Kaufman Center, a program run by Cascade Health Solutions. Andrea Gillespie is the Kaufman Center director, and Aline Price was the program facilitator the day I observed the group. Aline is a volunteer whose husband died several years ago of Alzheimer's.

Twelve people attended, three men and nine women, a group that has been meeting together over the last two years. They know each other's problems and are good friends. While the caregivers met downstairs to discuss issues and share experiences, their Alzheimer partners met separately upstairs for activities, etc. So the program serves a dual purpose for these challenged caregivers, both a respite and a chance to socialize, and a way to gain knowledge. There was a broad spectrum of expertise in the group, and people with advanced knowledge shared with others who knew less about the condition. There was discussion of new drugs being developed and physician opinions about them, as well as factual information about the disease causes and the more usual progressions of the disease from onset to death.

Individuals shared specific problems that had come up in their families. One man spoke about delusions: his wife has the persistent delusion that he is stealing her money. Several spoke about the embarrassment they feel caused by the public loss of inhibitions in Alzheimer patients. After these anecdotes group members offered suggestions from their own experience on how these problems might be handled and minimized. The group shared many laughs over the kinds of situations that come up, and encouraged each other to take care of themselves as well as their ill partners and parents. These articulate and intelligent people certainly commanded my respect and I think this is a most valuable program.