Steering Into the Skid: Utilizing the Dramatic Arts to Educate and Increase Awareness of the Impact of Dementia on Families (TH343)

John Morris, MD FAAHPM, Four Seasons Hospice, Flat Rock, NC
Margaret Noel, MD, MemoryCare, Asheville, NC

Objectives

- Recognize the growing need for caregiver education and support for families dealing with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.
- Recognize the use of an art form to provide education on how dementia impacts caregivers.
- Describe a readily available, affordable pathway to publish and use creative works to enhance professional and community understanding of the impact of illness.

As Alzheimer’s disease and other types of dementia become increasingly prevalent, the dramatic arts can help provide needed insight and understanding into this looming societal challenge. This concurrent session will illustrate how the dramatic arts can be used to educate medical professionals and the wider community in a creative way about the impact of dementia on family relationships. The presenters will perform a staged reading of a well-crafted one act play, Steering Into the Skid, by Deborah Ann Percy and Arnold Johnston. The play was written in response to a call for one-act plays that dramatize the full complexity and richness of the caregiving relationship, including its challenges and rewards.

Steering Into the Skid focuses on Amanda and Tim, both in their 60s, and in 12 short scenes set in their SUV, traces a year in their life together, from New Year’s Day to New Year’s Eve. As the months pass, the changes wrought by Alzheimer’s disease force each character to adjust to new demands on their imperfect but loving marriage.

The presenters will then lead a discussion to highlight how the play illustrates issues of impaired insight, the subtle line between normal aging changes and mild cognitive impairment, transitioning to dependence, and the unique challenges in communication presented by dementia. They will also discuss readily available and affordable tools that can help participants use creative works to educate and raise awareness regarding serious illnesses in their communities.

Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias demand the inclusion of caregivers to develop any form of effective care plan. Understanding the need to employ resources to train, educate, and prepare a caregiver for the role ahead can make a profound difference in the quality of life experienced by both patient and family in the face of a devastating illness.