**Finding Meaningful Memory Care**

“I feel like I’ve been on extended vacation,” Ron’s father Frank said, after his first day in a memory care facility. “Today was really enjoyable.”

Ron and I just melted with happiness. We had visited many facilities, with the hope of finding meaningful memory care with great activities. Frank couldn’t have said anything nicer.

It’s quite an emotional journey, finding meaningful memory care. I asked my friend, Dr. El, Dr. Eleanor Feldman Barbera, PhD, author of *The* *Savvy Resident’s Guide* and a columnist for *McKnight’s Long Term Care News*, for some tips.

**Finding Meaningful Memory Care With Engaging Activities**

“Remember, everything is an activity,” says Dr. El.She encourages care partners to seek a community with a dedicated memory care program, so people with cognitive impairments can benefit from all the offered activities.

“In a specialized unit, staff are trained to work with people who are living with dementia,” Dr. El says. “This training can help people enjoy greater independence.”

In one facility, a lady liked to wander into people’s rooms and take their jewelry. Rather than getting upset, the staff understood, framed this as “shopping,” and simply returned the jewelry.

“These kinds of insights create a calmer, slower-paced environment that reduces agitation,” says Dr. El.

**Seek Structure, Soothing and Variety**

Here are some things to look for, as you visit facilities:

* Is there a structure to the day?
* Are there calming activities scheduled for change of shift? Changing shift is disruptive, so some communities orchestrate a teatime with music or other soothing activities.
* Is there a home-like atmosphere?

You’re also making sure there are a variety of activities throughout the day. These should include:

Outdoor Time: Taking people outside makes a big difference in mood, appetite, and the sense of connection to the world.

Movement: Exercise is an important component to health.

Nurturing: Look for activities that make people feel confident and good about themselves, such as spa days. ELEANOR, IS THERE ANOTHER EXAMPLE HERE? …or activities that incorporate skills such as cooking, art or gardening, modified to provide a “success” experience.

Engagement: Being engaged, rather than just entertained, inspires a sense of purpose, creativity, and social connection.

**Kindness is Everything**

“Meet with the recreational therapist,” Dr. El suggests. “Is she compassionate and caring? Are the staff members kind? You can have all the activities in the world but if they’re not done with gentleness and humanity, they won’t work.”

Let the recreation director know what your loved one likes to do and see if she can adapt the activity.

**Stay Involved**

Visit as often as you can and attend activities together. Encourage friends and relatives to join you. Meet other residents and get to know the families and staff.

"You can act as a connector to create friendships, so residents engage in their own interaction, even when you aren't there," Dr. El says. ##

For more information, visit

Dr. Eleanor Feldman Barbera, PhD, http://www.eldercarewithdrel.com,

Treat yourself to Dr. El’s book, *The Savvy Resident’s Guide*