

With Alzheimer's, hope for the best, plan for the worst

By Angela Lunde, Mayo Clinic health education outreach coordinator

Last month, H.S. posted a comment about his father's fear of Alzheimer's, even refusal to use the word, and his concern that his parents are both ignoring a diagnosis.

If using the 'A' word creates an obstacle with your parents, then changing your language may help to open up lines of communication. If you say, "Dad can we talk about your memory loss?" you may get less resistance than saying, "The doctor said you have Alzheimer's disease."

Overall, the goal is not to agree on what to call 'it' but to be pro-active in receiving treatment and planning for the future. That being said, the following are important discussion topics to have with your parents and/or other family members. Keep in mind that you don't need to tackle them all in one conversation.

- ◆ Medications are available that can help to maintain a better quality of life. Discuss these options with your doctor.
- ◆ Review and discuss legal documents and make sure healthcare wishes and assets are managed the way you like. We should all do this from time to time anyway, so it isn't necessary to dwell upon the diagnosis as the reason for the conversation. In addition, consider meeting with an elder-law attorney.
- ◆ Know the resources in your area for help with services, support groups, online resources and other local programs for families.
- ◆ Begin to explore options for long-term care and memory care.

A common mantra we use in our support groups is "hope for the best, but plan for the worst." One of the most tragic situations I see is when families wait too long to create a plan and consequently find themselves in some sort of catastrophic situation and feeling powerless. To the best of your ability and within the limitations of your situation, H.S., please intervene.