

Vietnam Veteran with Alzheimer's Dementia

William has been struggling with short term memory loss for the past 5 or 6 years. He lives at home with his spouse, Kayla, who has become increasingly concerned about challenging behaviors that have begun to accompany his memory loss. His primary care physician informally diagnosed him with “dementia, likely Alzheimer’s” around 3 years ago, but didn’t recommend any specific resources to help Kayla navigate through his declining cognitive skills.

William, a Vietnam veteran and retired construction manager, suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Kayla has noticed that he has been experiencing nightmares and flashbacks as his dementia progresses, along with symptoms of depression. He becomes aggressive when Kayla is giving him instructions or attempts to help him with bathing or dressing. He asks the same questions about the daily schedule and mealtimes repeatedly throughout the day. William is constantly misplacing important items around the home and accuses Kayla of hiding them. Kayla tries to reason with William, but he only grows angrier, particularly in the evenings. He is also angry that Kayla won’t let him drive.

Kayla is at a breaking point when a friend refers her to Cognitive Concierge. Kayla meets individually with her Cognitive Consultant since William has little insight into his deficits. She immediately feels a sense of relief as her Cognitive Consultant identifies resources and strategies and illuminates a path forward.

Her Cognitive Consultant researches and builds a team of local experts:

a psychologist and a psychiatrist to evaluate and treat William's PTSD symptoms, occupational and speech therapists to provide in-home treatment, a social worker who specializes in dementia, to provide psychosocial interventions and counseling for caregiver burden. Kayla's Cognitive Consultant ensures that the team of experts are communicating rather than working in their separate silos, to provide collaborative care for William.

Kayla and her Cognitive Consultant work with the team of experts identify many strategies that are implemented and summarized in Kayla's Personalized Resource Page. William's psychiatrist prescribes medications to help manage his PTSD and depressive symptoms, while his psychologist meets with him weekly to talk through the traumatic events of his past, since long term memory is preserved. Kayla finds comfort in meeting with her own counselor each week, to discuss the overwhelming stress of caring for William.

Kayla's Cognitive Consultant finds that William's occupational and speech therapists have little training on person-centered care for people living with dementia, so she provides education and training to both professionals as they work with William. They identify the following strategies to help William and Kayla:

- Creation of a memory station in the kitchen with a large clock displaying the date, along with visual aids to help William recall the daily schedule and upcoming appointments. A dry erase board and memory wallet are used to display the answers to his repetitive questions.
- Environmental modifications and visual memory aids to establish consistent locations for important objects, along with validation training for Kayla on how to respond to William's accusations of her stealing his items.

- Creation of mock letter from a mechanic, stating that William's car is broken and is currently not safe to drive. Kayla is trained to present William with the letter when he is agitated about driving.
- Training for Kayla on communication strategies to increase comprehension of complex instructions, since William is having trouble with comprehension and sequencing. Visual aids are created for Kayla to use while he is bathing and dressing to decrease agitation.
- Education and training William's companion, on how to respond to William's agitation when she is caring for him. Creation of video on the companion's phone of Kayla, which can be played to redirect and calm William when he attempts to leave the home. They also work as a team to identify a schedule of activities for William to engage in with his companion.
- Creation of Montessori stations around the home, providing meaningful engagement for William each day. Stations are based upon William's work experience and hobbies. For example, a workbench is placed in the basement, with clearly labeled tools for sorting and wood for sanding.
- Creation of a memory book, highlighting major construction projects that William managed over his career, with large captions for him to read.
- Creation of visual memory aids, so William can more easily use the TV remote to find his favorite channels. A dry erase board is placed next to the TV which lists the times and channels of his favorite sports games that day.

After intensive support from her Cognitive Consultant for 3 months, Kayla feels in control of her situation. Although William still becomes

agitated at times, she feels that she has a full set of tools to help her problem solve. Kayla is also relieved that she can have respite each week, since William is able to stay with a companion without becoming upset. William enjoys engaging in the various activities set up around the home.

Over the next several years, Kayla works with her Cognitive Consultant to navigate through stressful situations, such as when William falls and is hospitalized for a hip fracture. Kayla's Cognitive Consultant immediately reaches out to the hospital staff and is an advocate for strategies to decrease agitation. They work as a team to set up memory aids in the hospital room to help orient William to his location and situation. Aids are also placed at the end of his bed to remind him to use his call light. They record Kayla's voice on a Walkman, and the nurses play the recording while showing him pictures of Kayla in his memory book. These strategies greatly ease his anxiety when Kayla isn't present. Kayla's Cognitive Consultant continues to ensure a smooth transition when William is transferred to a subacute rehabilitation center and works with the facility social worker and therapy team to implement orientation and memory strategies throughout his stay.

Over the years, Kayla feels that her Cognitive Consultant is her rock – the one person who is always there to advocate for William and to guide her through the difficult times.