

My name is Jim Dooley from Fairfax and I was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's in January 2014.

I'm not your image of a person with Alzheimer's, am I?

I worked as a counselor for veterans at the VA clinic in Burlington for 24 years, retiring in January 2014.

Because both my mother and grandfather had died from complications of Alzheimer's, I was in a clinical study every 3 years at John Hopkins since 2000. The last time I was assessed was in September 2013, and the study showed significant changes and it was suggested to me to see a local neurologist. I went to the Memory Center at The University of Vermont Medical Center and was further assessed for Alzheimer's. I was stunned when the MD confirmed that I had Alzheimer's disease even with my family history.

When I got my early diagnosis I no longer felt angry at myself because of my decline in functioning. The diagnosis gave me a concrete reason as to why I wasn't able to process things. Even though I was frustrated, I was now able to begin to move forward.

My initial reaction was one of resentment, sadness and despair. I thought I would rapidly decline and my functioning would start to fail. I didn't get a referral for any supportive help. It would have been easier if we had a roadmap which showed us how to connect with Alzheimer's Association or Agency on Aging to help sort out where the next step would take us.

A roadmap for the next steps would have been such a valuable resource to leave with. This has got to be a part of the diagnosis process! Luckily, we found our way, but not everyone can.

I was started on Aricept right away and then added a low dose of an antidepressant, I also went to counseling at the Vet center. By May I was starting to feel alive and functional. I am dealing with Alzheimer's by accepting that it will be a long process for me. It has been a positive experience for both myself and my wife to be part of an on-going dementia group on a regular basis.

In 1968 I detonated a trip grenade while serving in Vietnam and ended up with 25 holes and a paralyzed right leg. I was unable to hike, ski or go on a long walk so I started Motorcycle riding,

because when I am riding, I feel free. 45 years later I'm still riding, kayaking and just started adaptive skiing. Life isn't over for me.

Living with Alzheimer's is a learning process to a certain extent. I still need help with my appointments, dates and sometimes words, but it isn't the end for me.

Life is what you make of it.

Keep it simple and laugh a lot.

I am very concerned about the high number of people in Vermont currently diagnosed with Alzheimer's, 11,000 and that number is projected to increase to 17,000 by 2025 which is only 10 years away.

Alzheimer's is the 6th leading cause of death and the only one of the top ten diseases in America without a way to prevent it, cure it or slow the progression.

It is a hardship mentally, physically and financially on the families.

How can we as the State of Vermont help those in need?

- Start planning for it – early diagnosis worksheet.
- Request that Blueprint for Health include specific strategies related to Alzheimer's.
- Gather Vermont specific data about impact of dementia on our state.

What is everybody afraid of?

Why is it ok to let those diagnosed ADRD and their families just be forgotten about?

As a soldier, I learned that we leave no one behind.

Thank you,

Jim Dooley
Fairfax, Vermont