

My name is Jon Bouton. I live in Hartford near White River Junction. My wife, Judi Simon-Bouton, had dementia and died 2-1/2 years ago.

Judi was, among other things, a guiding parent, a master elementary school teacher and reading specialist, lifelong learner, lover of performances, lover of color, artist, and friend. She was loved by many. To celebrate her life, her friends filled the UU church in Woodstock with colorful quilts she created and gave away and colorful clothing and music. She would have loved it.

Complications of “dementia, probably Alzheimer’s” ended her life 2-1/2 years ago. I was her caregiver for several years as this horrible disease took away her enthusiasm and confidence, She lost her ability to cook and quilt. This outgoing woman grew afraid to leave the house. She had a seizure one morning after I brushed her teeth, fell back and mangled several vertebrae. In the hospital, she retained her cheerful repartee but didn’t know nor remember where she was. She went downhill and died in a skilled nursing facility / nursing home less than three months later.

When she was diagnosed with early onset dementia, probably Alzheimer’s, in 2020, the treatment was basically advice to live the best life you have left and get your affairs in order. Oh, and here are some resources to help you understand what’s coming, help you cope and medicines to control depression, anxiety and help you feel sharper.

So much has changed in the past 3 years.

In 2023 and '24, the FDA approved two drugs that can slow Alzheimer’s. These are for people in the earliest stages of this dementia.

Less than a year ago, the FDA approved a blood test that detects Alzheimer’s.

This could be a game changer.

Alzheimer’s diagnoses are typically confirmed with a PET scan interpreted by a specialist at a major hospital. In rural areas, that can mean a drive of more than an hour.

Blood samples, on the other hand, can be collected in a physician’s office and sent to a lab for analysis. Much easier for the patient and it does not use up limited PET scan equipment and expertise.

Six years ago, I would have had a hard time deciding I wanted to find out if I had Alzheimer’s. What was the point? Now, with both a way to diagnose Alzheimer’s early on and treatments to slow the disease, I definitely would want to know.

Health insurance should cover approved testing for biomarkers, not just for Alzheimer’s but also for cancers and other diseases that can be treated to improve quality of life. S. 154 is intended to assess the costs associated with health insurance coverage for biomarker testing. I see this as a first step towards mandating coverage, hopefully in the next biennium. Please pass S.154

Jonathan (Jon) L. Bouton  
POBox 4712 (79 Berry Hill)  
White River Junction, VT 05001  
Voice or text (802) 281-8917  
judijonvt@gmail.com