Center contributes to development of statewide Roadmap for Creating a Dementia-Capable Michigan

The Michigan Dementia Coalition is a statewide group of more than 120 individuals from nearly 65 organizations that work to improve quality of life for Michigan residents living with dementia and their families. Our Center has contributed to the work of the Coalition for several years and our very own Dr. Scott Roberts serves as Co-Chair for the Coalition.

The Coalition recently released a comprehensive Roadmap for Creating a Dementia-Capable Michigan to guide policymaking and advocacy efforts around dementia in Michigan. The publication of the Roadmap was announced on May 15 at the state capitol in Lansing as part of Older Michiganders Day.

Dr. Roberts assisted in the announcement of the plan on the capitol lawn, stating “Dementia directly affects hundreds of thousands of people within Michigan, and millions more across the country. Yet despite its profound costs, there are steps that individuals, families, local communities, and the state can take to increase quality of life for people living with dementia, address rising costs, and improve service delivery.”

Beyond co-leadership of the Coalition, our statewide research presence made our Center a key resource for the Coalition’s Roadmap development and continued statewide efforts to discover an intervention.

“The dementia research community in the state of Michigan is a diverse, multidisciplinary group consisting of basic scientists, clinical investigators, social and behavioral researchers, and other academic and service professionals,” Roberts said.

The Roadmap describes the following four key goals with strategies to make Michigan a more dementia-capable state by 2022:

- **People**: Promote the wellbeing and safety of people living with dementia at all ages and stages.
- **Partnerships**: Mobilize multisector partnerships to strengthen the service network.
- **Public Health**: Recognize and promote dementia as a public health priority.
- **Policies**: Enact policies that strengthen families, communities, and the economy.

For more information on the Coalition, the Roadmap report, or how to get involved, please visit www.midementiacoalition.org.
Note from the Director

When I assumed Directorship in 2011, our Center was a tiny operation – basically, a few staff and faculty working in the department of Neurology. In other words, a pretty small tent. Yet we were yearning to make a difference for a group of diseases, the dementias, which we can all agree is a “big tent” problem. Clearly we needed to expand our focus and set our sights higher. Over the next few years, we successfully engaged faculty across the entire University of Michigan campus to widen our reach and deepen our impact. Soon, we had strengthened our team to the point where we could reach for a more ambitious goal: become a Center that could serve the entire state by linking the three major research universities in Michigan. Well, have we achieved that goal? I’ll admit I’m biased. But I think the answer is an emphatic yes! Glance over the topics covered in this newsletter and you’ll see how this Center has indeed become a statewide treasure. Read about our third annual Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium, a very successful event that took place not in Ann Arbor but in Grand Rapids, hosted by our MSU colleagues. Learn about the participation of Center staff and faculty as they worked within the Michigan Dementia Coalition to develop a statewide dementia plan. Also, find out that we awarded seven (!) research pilot grants this year to kick-start studies across a wide range of topics. Funding this record number of awards was only made possible because we partnered across the three universities, providing support to young scientists across the state. And you’ll discover that we have started three new support groups for Lewy Body dementia (LBD), extending our reach statewide. There is no other Center in the country that provides this degree of outreach and support. So yes, we have begun to achieve our lofty goal of serving all Michiganders. Thank you for helping to make that happen!

Henry Paulson, MD, PhD
Lucile Groff Professor of Neurology
Director, Michigan Alzheimer’s Disease Center
Co-Director, UM Protein Folding Diseases Initiative
Center welcomes researchers to 3rd annual Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium

On July 19, our Center, led by the planning committee from Michigan State University, welcomed over 120 researchers, faculty members, and students to Grand Rapids for the third annual Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium. Keynote presentations were led by Dr. Linda Van Eldik, Director of the Sanders-Brown Center on Aging and Alzheimer’s Disease Center at the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Russell Swerdlow, Director of the University of Kansas Alzheimer’s Disease Center.

Dr. Van Eldik presented “Targeting Dysregulated Neuroinflammation in Alzheimer’s Disease” and Dr. Swerdlow presented “Mitochondria and Mitochondrial Cascades in Alzheimer’s.”

A poster session accompanied the day with 50 poster presentations ranging in topics from basic science to health disparities. Three poster winners were awarded for their strength in scientific merit including potential impact on Alzheimer’s disease research. These winners were Tamara Stevenson of the University of Michigan, Ahlam Soliman of Michigan State University, and Nadia Dehghani of the Van Andel Institute.

A highlight of the day were presentations led by four of our junior investigator trainees: Drs. Lenette M. Jones, Sheria Robinson-Lane, Julia Gerson, and DeAnnah Byrd. New to the dementia research field, these four investigators have worked tirelessly for over a year to develop their own dementia-related research projects and presentation skills, under the mentorship of our faculty. It was a joy to see their development and continue to watch their growth in this field.

The Symposium closed with a networking reception for attendees who joined us from near and far.

The next Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium will take place in May 2020 in Ann Arbor.

What’s new in research?

Our partners at Michigan State University, Drs. Marcia Gordon, Dave Morgan, and Scott Counts were awarded a nearly $3 million grant from the National Institute on Aging to study the tie between aging and Alzheimer’s disease through an innovative approach: senescent cells.

“Some people call them zombie cells,” Dr. Gordon told MSU Today in January 2019. “These cells stop performing their normal functions (cell division) and begin to send out signals that likely trigger adverse changes in the brain, including the clumping of the beta-amyloid protein and tangles of another called tau.”

The team’s goal over this five-year project is to delay the biological aging of the brain and deplete the number of senescent cells. The team will analyze brain tissue and laser capture microscopy to look for biomarkers that identify these senescent cells.

Although this is a new area of research for the field, Dr. Morgan shares, “We’ve got to think outside the box if we’re going to do something about Alzheimer’s.”

Left: Junior investigator, Dr. Lenette Jones presents about hypertension self-management within the African American population. Right: Dr. Marcia Gordon of Michigan State University reviews Miller Fawaz’s poster on the topic of imaging to detect microhemorrhages in dementia patients.

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Faculty from our three partner institutions also presented their latest research developments: Sami Barmada, MD, PhD of the University of Michigan presented “Atypical Protein Isoforms Driving Neurodegeneration in Frontotemporal Dementia and ALS,” Voyko Kavcic, PhD of Wayne State University presented “Novel Approach for Early Identification of Cognitive Declines in African American and Nicholas Kanaan, PhD of Michigan State University presented “Connecting Tau Conformations to Mechanisms of Toxicity.”

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The next Beyond Amyloid Research Symposium will take place in May 2020 in Ann Arbor.
Supporting innovative new research with the 2019 Pilot Project program

We are proud to support innovative, high-impact research into new ideas about the causes and treatment of dementias through our Pilot Project program. This program offers “kick-starter” research funding to junior investigators at the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, and Veteran Affairs Ann Arbor Health System so that they can begin testing their ideas.

This year, we had a record number of applicants with more than 30 applications. We are very proud to award four of these seven awards from collaborations with statewide programs and institutions, including Michigan State University, Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan Claude Pepper Center.

Please join us in congratulating the 2019-2020 Pilot Project recipients.

Omar Ahmed, PhD | University of Michigan

Project summary: In the brain, the retrosplenial cortex is essential for the formation and recall of memories. It is also one of the first brain regions to show decreased activity in the earliest stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Despite its clear importance in memory formation, the retrosplenial cortex is understudied. Dr. Ahmed’s team will combine multiple cutting-edge research technologies, including 3D holographic circuit mapping, to investigate the precise cells, circuits and brain rhythms that are altered in Alzheimer’s disease. This will help to identify novel molecular and cellular targets in the retrosplenial cortex for the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease.

Scott Counts, PhD & Yu-Chung Norman Cheng
Michigan State University & Wayne State University

Project summary: Small bleeding or coagulated blood inside the brain appears in people with dementia. Those small bleeds also appear in people with stroke or traumatic brain injuries, of whom a certain fraction can become demented. As the number of small bleeds does not seem to be the deciding factor to diagnose dementia, this pilot project examines the magnetic properties and volumes of those small bleeds in brain samples from people with and without dementia. Drs. Counts and Cheng will measure magnetic properties and the volume of each small object from MRI images, and determine whether each object seen in MRI is a small bleed through histology examination. If a stronger magnetic property quantified from MRI reflects a higher concentration of blood in histology, especially from people with dementia, then the magnetic property of small bleeds may be a potential biomarker for some dementias.

Benjamin Combs, PhD | Michigan State University

Project summary: In Alzheimer’s disease, modified forms of tau protein can disrupt axonal transport, a critical process for maintaining the health and function of neurons. This project will examine functional interactions between tau and cytoplasmic dynein, the motor complex responsible for transport of material from the synapse to the cell body, to better understand the process by which modified tau disrupts axonal transport in disease. This study will further our understanding of toxic events in Alzheimer’s disease and may provide potential targets for the development of therapies to slow or stop disease progression.
Patrick Pruitt, PhD | Wayne State University

Project summary: Given the current lack of effective medicine for dementia, it is important to better understand behavioral factors that delay or prevent age-related cognitive decline. Interventions using social interactions are effective at enhancing cognitive performance in older adults; conversely, social isolation is a risk factor for dementia. Together, these observations suggest social engagement is an important aspect of healthy cognitive aging. But how is social engagement related to the function of major brain networks which support cognition? Answering this question will be critical as researchers and clinicians try to use social interactions to promote healthy cognition in older adults. Dr. Pruitt’s project will investigate the relationship between social isolation and disrupted connectivity within and between major brain networks. By identifying the disrupted connections associated with social isolation and poor cognitive performance, the team will shed light on brain mechanisms through which social isolation contributes to cognitive decline and establish these connections as critical targets for future interventions.

Sheria Robinson-Lane, PhD | University of Michigan

Project summary: Black family caregivers of persons with dementia have an increased risk for developing dementia themselves. A combination of stress and chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure contributes to both this risk, and to the risk of future disability. Evidence suggests that, in addition to regular cognitive testing, handgrip strength can tell us about cognitive decline. As work moves towards designing a highly effective intervention for Black caregivers, it is necessary to find the most efficient ways of gathering caregiver information and ensuring that the types of information we gather do not create too much of a burden on participating caregivers. In addition to gathering information about caregiver handgrip strength and cognition, this pilot study tests the ease of administering and completing an electronic survey about caregiver social support and personal health. Through this work, Dr. Robinson-Lane hopes to develop a culturally tailored program for dementia caregivers.

Benjamin Singer, MD | University of Michigan

Project summary: Many families and doctors observe that patients with early symptoms of dementia, previously functioning well at home, lose their independence and have rapid progression of dementia after hospitalization for an infectious illness. This experience is borne out in epidemiologic studies, but the mechanism of the interaction is unknown. Dr. Singer’s laboratory uses animal models and human autopsy tissue to study mechanisms of brain injury and neuroinflammation that occur in survivors of acute medical illness, especially systemic infections and pneumonia. His laboratory will use this pilot award to test the hypothesis that early Alzheimer’s disease pathology and systemic infection interact synergistically to sustain a state of persistent, but potentially treatable, inflammation in the brain.

Matthias Truttmann, PhD | University of Michigan

Project summary: In Alzheimer’s disease, toxic protein aggregates (clumps) challenge and kill cells in our brains, triggering memory loss. Dr. Truttmann’s project aims to elucidate why these protein aggregates are toxic to cells. The team hypothesizes that protein aggregates found in Alzheimer’s disease challenge energy homeostasis in brain cells, which will eventually lead to their collapse. They will test this hypothesis using small nematode (worm) Alzheimer’s disease models that allow us to examine basic mechanisms of protein aggregation disorders. In these worms, they will examine 1) how the appearance of toxic protein aggregates affects cellular carbohydrate (sugar) and lipid (fat) consumption and 2) how protein aggregation-linked changes in cellular carbohydrate and lipid turn-over alters the performance, fitness and durability of neurons.
Detroit Advisory Group moves forward with new staff, educational events

Our Center has a strong emphasis on recruiting underrepresented minorities into dementia research. We are pleased to have launched a Detroit Advisory Group this year, to promote recruitment of African Americans in the metro Detroit area.

The Detroit Advisory Group is led by Center Associate Director, Dr. Bruno Giordani, Center Junior Investigator, Dr. Lenette Jones, and Assistant Professor at the University of Detroit Mercy and President of Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc., Dr. Nutrena Tate. Group leadership, along with other members from the Center and the Detroit community, convened earlier this year to discuss the mission of the group. This mission includes:

- Developing relationships with community organizations in Detroit
- Identifying community champions
- Forming close relationships with Chi Eta Phi Sorority to provide education and gain interest in research opportunities
- Identifying men’s organizations and champions to enhance African American male recruitment
- Developing educational sessions and materials tailored to underrepresented minorities in research.

Since the initial meeting earlier this year, we are happy to report several successes:

**Hiring of New Center Education Program Coordinator**

Amber Williams, MSA, joined the Center as the Education Program Coordinator in May 2019 and will be the Center lead for the Detroit Advisory Group’s programs. Amber works with clinical and outreach faculty and staff to enhance recruitment into research studies, especially recruitment from underrepresented groups. She continues to build already established connections with a particular focus on African American organizations in metro Detroit.

**Presentations at Two Chi Eta Phi Sorority Events**

The Detroit Advisory Group leadership organized two education events for Chi Eta Phi Sorority nurses in Detroit this July. Dr. Edna Rose presented to the group on Alzheimer’s disease at these events before the group broke out for roundtable discussion facilitated by Dr. Nutrena Tate, Dr. Lenette Jones, and Amber Williams. The discussion provided all attendees with the opportunity discuss African Americans’ reluctance to participate in research and what must be done moving forward. We look forward to our partnership with the Chi Eta Phi Sorority nurses on this endeavor!

**Launch of Michigan Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center Speaker Series**

In an effort to educate the Detroit and Ann Arbor communities on research and enhance recruitment statewide, the Detroit Advisory Group will launch a series of educational events for the public on various aging-related topics. We are happy to announce that this series will begin August 2019. Monthly events will occur in Detroit and Ann Arbor. More information on the Speaker Series can be found on page 12.

We are thrilled with the success of the Detroit Advisory Group so far this year, and look forward to sharing about our continued involvement in the Detroit community.
One family’s experience with brain donation

“This was something important to our dad, hence, very important to us that we help make it happen, as he wished,” Bonnie shares with Matthew Perkins, Michigan Brain Bank Coordinator. Bonnie’s father, David, passed just last year, but had signed up for the brain donation program some 15 years earlier at the onset of his journey with what he and his family thought was Alzheimer’s disease.

“Our grandmother lived a long, agonizing journey with Alzheimer’s disease for nearly 20 years. Our mother also struggled with memory loss, though it was never diagnosed. So Dad really wanted to help and signed up for the brain donation program some 15 years earlier at the onset of his journey with what he and his family thought was Alzheimer’s disease.

Although David lived for nearly 15 years with a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease, at his autopsy his children learned that he was in fact living with a similar but distinctly different disorder called Primary Age-Related Tauopathy (or PART). PART manifests similarly to Alzheimer’s disease in the clinic, however, pathologically the brain only shows signs of neurofibrillary tau tangles. The other pathological hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease, beta amyloid plaques, are missing. At this time, PART is impossible to detect in the clinic and can only be diagnosed through brain autopsy.

There is still so much research that needs to be done and knowledge to be gained so that patients and their families can receive accurate diagnoses. “I just want to understand,” Bonnie shared as she describes her thirst for knowledge when it comes to her father’s health and the health of her entire family line as it relates to dementia.

The brain donation program here at our Center, in partnership with the Michigan Brain Bank, offers an outlet for patients and their families to contribute to future knowledge while also receiving concrete answers to their family member’s medical condition. The program supports hundreds of research studies across the country. Family members of those who participate in brain donation also receive a complete report following autopsy so that they can learn the full scope of their family member’s disease, and how it could relate to their own health.

Participating in a program such as brain donation is a big, and sometimes uncomfortable decision for family members to face. To provide comfort and assistance throughout the entire process, family members and patients are able to contact Matthew Perkins, Coordinator of the Michigan Brain Bank, with any and all questions. Matthew himself arranges all the paperwork, communicates with families, and performs the autopsies, so it is often comforting that he knows all volunteers by name.

David passed almost a year ago, and Bonnie can still describe the feelings she felt when she received a call from Center Director, Dr. Hank Paulson on the morning of her father’s autopsy. “He was so kind, and expressed his deep gratitude for our father’s donation. He and Matthew truly made this journey easier.”

Read more about this family’s story in the Share Your Story article on page 11.
In a state where many health care professionals have never heard of Lewy body dementia (LBD), one of the most critical aims of the Carl Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative is to educate health care professionals and build public awareness of LBD across Michigan.

Members of the Rinne LBD Initiative team, and support group members Annette and Barry Kaufman, had the honor of presenting a three-hour LBD workshop at the statewide Mental Health and Aging Conference in Lansing this year. A first of its kind at this annual conference, the workshop combined a clinician presentation by Dr. Sue Maixner, a University of Michigan geriatric psychiatrist, with the real-life perspectives of living with Lewy body dementia by Barry Kaufman and his wife, Annette. Renee Gadwa, Rinne LBD Initiative Program Manager, also had the opportunity to share about the Initiative’s founders, Carl Rinne and Tamara Real, and its five statewide LBD support groups.

This LBD topic attracted over 70 conference attendees – comprised of nurses, social workers, professional caregivers, therapists, and other various community members. Evaluation results showed that 99% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the workshop was effective, clear, and well-organized. One attendee commented, “One of the best presentations that I have been to in many years. Having the Kaufman’s share their story was very powerful, and the varied perspectives were enlightening.”

Barry and Annette Kaufman have been dedicated members of the Rinne LBD Initiative’s Ann Arbor support groups since the groups began in 2010. When the Kaufman’s reflected about their participation in the conference, Annette stated “We were both overwhelmed by the strength of the applause we received from the attendees. Like many dealing with LBD, we have been impacted on many occasions by the lack of information about the disease in the medical community. We are grateful that we were able to be a part of a team that helped enlighten those actually in the trenches dealing with patient care.”

We are so grateful to have families like the Kaufmans who are willing to share their story.

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**Announcing 4th annual Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative lectures**

We are pleased to welcome Melissa Armstrong, MD, MSc of the University of Florida this fall for our 4th annual Carl Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative lectures. Dr. Armstrong’s research focuses on the lived experience of disease for individuals with Lewy body dementia and their families. This work ranges from patient and caregivercare priorities to hospital outcomes and end-of-life experiences.

**Lewy Body Dementia Basics & What to know about Hospitalization in LBD**  
**Tuesday, October 29, 2:00pm**  
**Location TBD**

The community lecture (details above) is free and open to the public. Dr. Armstrong will present the following morning to faculty, residents, and medical students as part of the University of Michigan Neurology Grand Rounds.

Please contact Renee Gadwa at rgadwa@med.umich.edu or 734-764-5137 with any questions.
The Center is Committed to Memory & Aging Research, Clinical Care, Education and Wellness

Dr. Paulson’s update on the Lewy Body Dementia Association Research Centers of Excellence

In June, I was privileged to be one of many leaders of Lewy Body Dementia Association (LBDA) Research Centers of Excellence (RCOE) who gathered at an annual meeting in Las Vegas. This was the third meeting for this new network, which was created to foster discoveries that will lead to better treatments for LBD.

So, how are we doing and what’s the progress for 2019?

I’d say pretty well. We learned about a new “tool kit” for LBD diagnosis, assembled by our British colleagues. We discussed how to discover biomarkers of LBD that would facilitate diagnosis and improve clinical trials. We even talked about whether we can define a “prodromal” period of disease, akin to what has been described for the Alzheimer’s disease process.

Why does this matter?

Disease-slowing therapies are likely to be most effective if given early in the course of disease. If we can identify the earliest signs of disease before clinical symptoms are prominent (in other words, during the prodromal period), then hopefully we will be able to provide treatment at the best possible time - before the disease begins to take its toll.

While we don’t have those therapies yet, I think all of us left this meeting feeling we are on the right path.

For more information about the LBDA RCOE, please visit lbda.org/rcoecenters

New LBD support groups launched this spring

We are thrilled to announce the addition of three new Lewy body dementia (LBD) support groups across the state of Michigan this year. The Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative now offers support groups for those living with LBD and their families / caregivers in Lansing, as well as two northern Michigan support groups in Boyne City and Harbor Springs specifically for family members and caregivers caring for someone with LBD. Details regarding each group are below.

Ann Arbor
2nd Tuesday of the month
2:00-3:30pm
StoryPoint Senior Living
6230 S. State Road

Harbor Springs
2nd Tuesday of the month
6:00-7:30pm
Pineview Cottage
3498 Harbor-Petoskey Road

Boyne City
2nd Tuesday of the month
2:00-3:30pm
Sommerset Pointe Yacht Club
00970 Marine Drive

Lansing
4th Thursday of the month
10:00-11:30am
Senior CommUnity Care of MI PACE
1921 East Miller Road

For more information, or to register for an upcoming group, please contact Renee Gadwa at rgadwa@med.umich.edu or 734-764-5137.
A generous donation benefits Alzheimer’s disease research

Since 1975, we have been pleased to have the support of Fraternal Order of Eagles chapters across the state. This past year, we were thrilled to be selected by longtime partner, Linda Day, Madame President of the Michigan State Auxiliary, as the recipient of their 2019 philanthropy. In June, we learned that their efforts equated to $73,000 in donations to Alzheimer’s disease research.

Stephen Campbell, Research Projects Manager for the Center, and longtime partner with the Fraternal Order of Eagles stated,

“Indeed, these are hard earned dollars and we are humbled that they chose our group as the recipient of such a generous contribution.”

Center Director Dr. Hank Paulson also shared, “These funds will go a long way in our effort to find biomarkers of dementia that will improve diagnosis and speed the discovery of therapies.” Thank you to Linda and her team, and to all who donate to our Center.

Turning to nature to support caregiver wellbeing

Nature is all around us. We interact with it on a daily basis, though often mindlessly and with little intention. It’s a fairly new discipline to look at nature for its power in wellbeing and Illness. Our Center’s own Caregiver Wellness Initiative has been practicing this connection between health and nature since its inception in 2012. The Initiative’s programs are all held at the University of Michigan’s Matthaei Botanical Gardens, providing a powerful and soothing environment for the self-care and mindfulness practices that take place in these programs.

The tie between nature and health, as it pertains to dementia, was recently brought into the media in a New York Times article by renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks. In his piece titled, The Healing Power of Gardens, Dr. Sacks shares, “I cannot say exactly how nature exerts its calming and organizing effects on our brain, but I have seen in my patients the restorative and healing powers of nature and gardens, even for those who are deeply disabled neurologically. In many cases, gardens and nature are more powerful than any medication.” Research is growing in understanding exactly how nature supports personal health and public health, and its implications for ongoing wellbeing, disease management, and caregiving.

Our connection to nature is deeply personal and it is also a universal, shared experience, just as our experience of suffering and coping with illness. Dr. Sacks brought this deeply rooted connection to light stating, “I have a number of patients with very advanced dementia or Alzheimer’s disease... Put them in front of a flower bed with some seedlings, and they will know exactly what to do. I have never seen a patient plant something upside down.”

Over the past seven years the Caregiver Wellness Initiative programs have grown into an array of offerings, including monthly sessions, eight-week courses, and semiannual retreats. Now, for the first time, these programs are expanding beyond Ann Arbor to areas across the state through the Initiative’s new THRIVE program. As these programs expand, a garden environment is built into the program’s foundation.

For more information about the Caregiver Wellness Initiative, please visit alzheimers.med.umich.edu/wellness-initiative. For more information about the THRIVE network, please visit thrivenetworkmi.org.
How one family found joy in the journey with dementia

Bonnie is no stranger to dementia. Her grandmother faced a 15-year journey with the disease that came to a close in 1995. Her mother faced undiagnosed memory loss for several years before suddenly passing in 2011. And her father, David, lived with dementia for 15 years before passing away last summer. Each of these journeys brought many challenges along the way, but what Bonnie remembers most, and the most important message she would like to share, is that so much joy is still possible when living with dementia.

Bonnie's father's journey with dementia progressed slowly. His wife cared for him for many years, but as things progressed Bonnie eventually began splitting her time between her home in Chicago, and her parents’ home in Ann Arbor. She would split caregiving shifts with her three brothers, two of which lived locally, and one who resided in Connecticut. Once their mother passed, Bonnie and her siblings were the sole caregivers for their father, along with professional in-home caregivers for around five years. Eventually, they moved their father into a memory care facility.

Bonnie describes these years with her father as a true blessing, “My siblings and I are just grateful to have had that time with Dad.” When the disease was at its worst, and her father had lost hope, Bonnie remembers cherishing every moment she still had with him.

“Dad was always really focused on family,” Bonnie shared. “He loved concerts, singing, and playing games.” To keep their father active and engaged, their family spent time together going to free concerts around town, playing Rummikub and chess with grandchildren, attending Mud Hens games with family, and singing songs their father remembered from college. “He was still the same person,” Bonnie shared, “so we would opt to do things we knew he would enjoy, and it often brought a smile to his face.” Bonnie recounts this joy as she remembers her father tapping his foot and slapping his knee gleefully at a local concert. She also shares memories of him mixing up the rules to chess while playing with his grandson, and the grandson cheerfully responding that they were “playing with Grandpa’s new rules now.”

Even when things grew difficult, Bonnie and her family always tried to meet their father where he was. As the disease progressed, their father eventually lost his speech. For joy, Bonnie shared that he would sit on the porch and watch the world go by. He could bond with his grandchildren in a very unique way, bringing Bonnie and her siblings genuine happiness.

In Bonnie’s words, “This disease robs us of some amazing people, but I want others to know that we should still treat them with dignity and as the person we have always loved.” Alzheimer’s disease is known to take many things from the lives of those affected. But, if we let it, it may allow us to see life through a different lens - one that brings us unexpected and unconventional joy.

Read more about this family’s experience with brain donation on page 7.

If you are interested in sharing your story with dementia, please contact Erin Fox at eefox@med.umich.edu or 734-232-2459.
Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center Speaker Series

AUGUST 8
UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA
Henry Paulson, MD, PhD
University of Michigan Detroit Center
3663 Woodward Ave #150
Detroit, MI
6-8pm

SEPTEMBER 26
ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE IN THE NEWS
Navid Seraji-Bozorgzad, MD
Ann Arbor District Library
Malletts Creek Branch
3090 E Eisenhower Pkwy
Ann Arbor, MI
12-2pm

OCTOBER 23
DIET, EXERCISE & DEMENTIA
Edna Rose, PhD, MS, RN-BC
University of Michigan Detroit Center
3663 Woodward Ave #150
Detroit, MI
10am-12pm

Registration is free but required. To register, call Erin Fox at 734-232-2459.

The Michigan Alzheimer’s Disease Center is funded by the NIH/National Institute on Aging (5P30AG053760)