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What To Do After A Diagnosis of Alzheimer's

by Jessica A. Hayes, Esq.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, in 2015, an estimated 5.3 million Americans will have Alzheimer's disease. 1 in 3 seniors will die with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, and almost two-thirds of individuals with Alzheimer's will be women. Alzheimer's is clearly on the rise; between 2000 and 2013, deaths attributed to Alzheimer's disease increased a staggering 71 percent. With statistics like these, there is little doubt that you or someone you know will be impacted by this devastating disease during your lifetime.

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's is unwelcome news, often met with a variety of emotions and sometimes denial. If you or a loved one are diagnosed with Alzheimer's, however, there are several things you can do to prepare for the progression of the disease, to alleviate your concerns about long-term care and the associated costs, and to protect and provide for your family in the future.

Depending on the stage at which you receive a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, you may still have the capacity to sign legal documents. One of the first things you should do upon receiving a diagnosis is make an appointment with an elder law attorney. An experienced elder law attorney can review any existing estate planning documents to determine their sufficiency in light of your diagnosis, and can assess your ability to sign any new legal documents. If you do not have current estate planning documents, it is extremely important that you consider putting into place such documents as a Power of Attorney, Advance Medical Directive, and Will. Of the three, the Power of Attorney is arguably the most important; in the event that you become unable to manage your financial affairs, you should have an individual or individuals named who can assist you in that regard. There are some powers you may want to specifically list in your Power of Attorney which would allow the person(s) you name as agent to assist you in qualifying for public benefits. Don't take a gamble by using an online drafting service to create these documents; see an experienced elder law attorney for assistance with this.

Upon receipt of a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, it is also a good idea to consider your wishes for future treatment. In the event you become unable to care for yourself, is someone available to care for you in your home, or would you need to move to an assisted living facility or nursing home? How will you pay for your care? An experienced elder law attorney can help you put a plan into place for where you might receive future care and how you will pay for it. If you may need to qualify for public benefits to help defray the costs of nursing home level care in the future, an elder law attorney can assist you in reviewing your financial situation and making

What To Do After A Diagnosis of Alzheimer's (cont'd)

related recommendations. Having a good plan in place may save you a significant amount of money, stretching your savings further and preserving more to pass down to your loved ones at your death.

Individuals recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's – and their loved ones – should also consider taking advantage of the numerous resources provided to them by their local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. These resources include support groups, classes, and a wealth of knowledge available both online and in print. You can start by visiting www.alz.org, or by contacting your local chapter. A 24-hour hotline is also available at 1-800-272-3900.

Although there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's, significant progress is being made in Alzheimer's research, to try and prevent, slow, and cure this debilitating disease. The Hook Law Center participates in the annual Walk to End Alzheimer's, held in Virginia Beach in October. We invite you to join us in raising awareness and money to help find a cure.



Canines Helping Humans

Hook Law Center: Kit Kat, can you tell us about the Canine Assistants program?

Kit Kat: Canine Assistants is a wonderful program founded in 1991 near Atlanta, GA that trains service dogs. It was created by Jennifer Arnold, who herself, suffers from multiple sclerosis and had need of assistance with the daily tasks of life like turning on lights, retrieving things from the floor, opening doors, etc.

The great thing about this program is that the client pays nothing to obtain an assistant. The program is funded from foundations and other sources of donation. Since its inception, more than 1,700 dogs have been in placed in 48 states and 5 countries. Labrador and golden retrievers and goldendoodles are preferred, though mixed breeds are allowed.

The training method used is called Bond-Based Choice Teaching. The puppies begin at 5 weeks of age. The method focuses on building trust, rather than responding to routine commands. Milk-bone dog snacks are used not in some Pavlovian manner as a response to executing the command, but rather as a way of the trainer expressing affection and thanking for a job well done. The training period lasts for a year and a half.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the program is how the client and the canine are matched. It's a bit like dating, but it is the canine who ultimately makes the choice. Arnold says, "It's incredible. A dog will politely greet five people and upon reaching the sixth will go crazy as if saying, 'Where have you been? I've been

Canines Helping Humans (cont'd)

waiting for you!" One human recipient was so grateful for her assistant. She is a quadriplegic, and received a dog named Magic. She said, 'My dog, Magic, made my wheelchair disappear.' The two were a pair for nearly 12 years!

Canine Assistants is doing a superb job in making many peoples' lives more rich and fulfilling!

(Suzanne Wright, "Training prepares pups for service," [USA Today](#), April 3, 2015)



Join Hook Law Center in celebrating
National Autism Awareness Month!



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Upcoming Events

- **April 27 & 30, 2015** – The HLC Monthly Seminar for **April** is **Veterans Benefits – How Proposed Changes Will Affect You!** The seminar is scheduled at 10 a.m. on Monday, April 27, 2015 at the Meyera E. Oberndorf Central Public Library, 4100 Virginia Beach Boulevard, Virginia Beach, VA and at 10 a.m. on Thursday, April 30, 2015 at the Hilton Garden Inn, 5921 Harbour View Boulevard, Suffolk, VA. To register and reserve your seat, please call 757-399-7506 and ask for Debbie.
- **June 25, 2015** – Andrew H. Hook will be speaking to a group at the Virginia Beach Psychiatric Center in Virginia Beach, VA.
- **August 12, 2015** – Andrew H. Hook will be speaking to a group at Maryview Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia.
- **August 21, 2015** – Andrew H. Hook will be speaking to a group at DePaul Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia.
- **August 27, 2015** – Andrew H. Hook will be speaking to a group at Mary Immaculate Hospital in Newport News, Virginia.
- **September 9, 2015** – Andrew H. Hook will be speaking at a Virginia Continuing Legal Education seminar, location TBA.
- **October 26, 2015** – Shannon Laymon-Pecoraro will be speaking at the National Business Institute's seminar on The Probate Process from Start to Finish in Virginia Beach, VA.



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