

An evening with Teepa Snow

On May 22 Sydney was the lucky host of renowned dementia specialist Teepa Snow as part of the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia's Family and Friends Night. The evening was supported by New Dawn Enterprises, Cape Breton District Health Authority, Northwood, The Alzheimer's Café Cape Breton and Home Instead Cape Breton.

As a certified Occupational Therapist, Teepa has the unique medical perspective on how the brain controls our body and our behaviors, giving her the perfect medical degree to explain how a brain disease like dementia affects a person.

The group listened, learned and communicated for over two hours.

While here, Teepa not only provided knowledgeable information on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, she also answered many great questions from those in attendance. A few have been captured here.



How did you get started in this line of work?

"When I was eight my grandfather came to live with us after my grandmother died. He had to move in because the people in the apartment said he was trying to break into other apartments at night. He was a retired maintenance man and now he was trying to fix things that he fixed 30 years ago, and the landlord said come and get him he can't stay here. My mom was not a good caregiver, but I realized I was, so I stepped into that role, even at eight. I get it, I said to granddad, that it's hard that we don't have grandma anymore isn't it? I miss her a lot, and I bet you miss her too. But I need your help now, can you help me? And he helped me because he liked me, and I helped him because I loved him. And so I became his primary caregiver."

Can you help with ideas for my mom who is in a long term care facility but always says I don't like it here and I want to go home?

"So, tell her: I know how hard that must be that you don't like being here, and you want to go home. It's hard being away from where you love isn't it? You

don't like it at all...but tell me more about it, tell me about home. What your mom is really saying is that this place isn't familiar and I want my home, my home I grew up in. And all she is saying is that she is lost in her life. What you can say is, "You want to go home," because that's validation for her. But there is no fix; what you have to do is just make it ok for her. It's just a moment of time for your mom where she feels like she is in the wrong place, and it's our job to make it ok for her to be there. Take her for a walk or drive around find her something sweet to eat. It's moments by moments by moments, the hard part is letting go because it isn't going to be logical - that part of her brain is dying."

So, you've talked about the use of sugar and the help it can be on the brain, but what if the person won't eat sugar?

"Do they not like sugar or they just won't eat it? (Response- No, he just won't eat it and he doesn't even eat much) Well, what we have to worry more about now is failure to thrive. And now you have to think that perhaps he is ready to go home and not on this earth.

And the question is can you give him permission? Can you say, it's ok and you've done everything you needed to do and you can go if you need to. You've done everything you need to, and I love you. The push for food is not from them it's from us. Their brain is saying I'm done, I'm finished. They are not hungry and they are not thirsty. This is coming to the end of the disease. Our challenge is learning the art and difference between giving up and letting go. And it's simply in letting go. Because unlike children, even if you feed them they will not grow, it's the end not the beginning and learning that art is a real challenge. But, you have to give permission...dads don't leave their girls, husbands don't leave wives and friends don't leave friends. So you have to say, it's ok if you have to go, I'll miss you and I love you but I understand. But, you need to get ready, because it is going to happen, and the hard part is they need to know that it's ok for both of you because they still love you and you have to give them permission."