

# The Thurston-Mason Senior News

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## The Family Caregiver

### To Tell or Not To Tell

To Tell or not to tell. That is the question.

We are familiar with Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be, that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune . . . "

For caregivers of someone with dementia, "to be or not to be" is more the question, "To tell or Not to Tell?" To tell your person with dementia that a new caregiver is coming today, they have a doctor's appointment the next day, or who will visit next week.

To tell or not to tell?' That is an important caregiving question. The following are thoughts about telling.

**Tell Less:** Tell them less than you were able to pre-dementia. The person with dementia loses the ability to understand and remember multi-step instructions. Less of an explanation is better. It can be a struggle to simplify messages for them, while editing thoughts as you speak. As you tell them, ask yourself how important is this for them to know or do? Is it time to tell them less about the new Medicare Part D options, or are instructions how to cream the butter for the cookies that important?



Dementia reduces the word comprehension. Using fewer and simpler words when you talk with them, becomes a necessary caregiving strategy.

**Tell enough:** Tell them enough to help them know what is going on right now. Telling them enough is especially necessary when providing hands-on personal care. For example, tell them you are washing their hands, rinsing and then towel them dry. Simple narration of what they are experiencing is helpful. You get extra credit if you sing the instructions as you help them!

Tell them enough for them to participate in family life. If you tell them about the new grandchild, depending on the stage of dementia, they may be happy about the new family member, maybe ask again who had a baby, or perhaps forget entirely. It is all about working to keep their world safe and comfortable for them.

Tell them enough may include sad news. Does your family member with dementia need to know a friend or relative has died? How will they understand the death? Are they in a stage of dementia when they

frequently ask about the passing and therefore feel the grief each time you answer them?

Another caregiving dilemma is what to tell about an additional diagnosis, such as cancer.

Palliative Care Principles are helpful when deciding these issues. Palliative care focuses on the comfort and safety of the person with dementia. How will the information affect both their physical and emotional comfort? Health care professionals and family members may have suggestions or advice based on care choice. The care receiver may have said in the past what they would like if faced with such health care decisions.

These are just principles of telling or not telling. Your best judgment remains the greatest guide for providing safe and comfortable care for your family member.

This article is a service of the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging. For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program, call (360) 664-2168 and ask to speak with a Resource Manager or visit our website at [WWW.LMTAAA.ORG](http://WWW.LMTAAA.ORG)