

Town Hall Meeting – New LHH Resident Policy  
May 10, 2007  
Forest Hills Christian Church- Testimony by Sherrie Matza

In an ideal world, we would all exercise self-determination regarding where we will live when we become disabled, frail or ill...and rest assured, all of us, at some point during our lives, WILL fall into that category. But, one segment of our population cannot make their own decisions because they have Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Self determination is largely meaningless to them because people with Alzheimer's disease experience not only memory decline but also a loss of intellectual functions – thinking, remembering, reasoning – severe enough to interfere with everyday life. Symptoms include debilitating confusion, impaired judgment and perhaps even personality and behavior changes. Communication is difficult as the person with Alzheimer's struggles to find words, finish thoughts, or follow even the simplest directions. Eventually, persons with Alzheimer's will become totally unable to care for themselves....to manage their finances, to cook, to dress, to eat, to bathe. Living independently therefore becomes impossible.

With this picture of a person living with Alzheimer's, you can understand why I am here to speak for those who can no longer speak for themselves. This is not just a theoretical issue for me; it's personal. When my mother first developed symptoms of Alzheimer's, she was only in her mid 60's. The course of the disease ran for almost 20 years, and although I cared for her in my home the best I could, with the help of home care aides and adult day centers so that I could continue to work, the last 5 years of her life were spent in a nursing home. That was the only possible solution for her advanced disease; she needed the type of care that only a skilled facility could provide.

**It is a simple fact that nearly everyone with Alzheimer's disease will eventually need more assistance than families and friends can provide and an appropriate long-term care setting is required.**

You may not be aware that the catastrophic brain damage associated with Alzheimer's may begin years or even decades before symptoms begin to appear. Thus, all of us in this room may be helpless to stave off a future living with Alzheimer's.

Every 72 seconds someone in America develops Alzheimer's; by mid-century, someone will develop the disease every 33 seconds. Lest you think that this is still a distant problem, or that the disease only affects the very old, let me provide you with more shocking statistics:

- By 2050, the number of people living with Alzheimer's disease in California will soar from the current 500,000 to 1.5 Million. In fact, one well-known researcher has opined that by mid-century, there will be two types of adults – those with Alzheimer's and those caring for them.
- 13%, or one in eight, persons age 65 and over have Alzheimer's disease. This further breaks out to:
  - Age 65-74 – 2%
  - Age 75 – 84 – 19%
  - Age 85 + - 42%
- By 2020, the number of Alzheimer's patients in SF alone is estimated at approximately 12,400, with most (over 10,000) age 85 or older.

Today, between 60,000 and 80,000 Californians YOUNGER than 65 have Alzheimer's or a related dementia.

The surge in the number of people with Alzheimer's has significant implications for California; today, close to 70% of all nursing home residents in the state have some type and stage of dementia.

San Francisco's specific demographics point to an even greater concern. Although those age 60 and older represent 14% of California's population, they are almost 18% of the population in San Francisco. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in the City; and by 2020, they are expected to comprise 21.3% of the population.

There is a growing demand for services for people who have, or will have, Alzheimer's and both SF and the state of California are woefully unprepared to respond to this century's next public health crisis. This is not fear mongering. It is simple arithmetic. In fact, the situation is so serious that State Senator Elaine Alquist has authored legislation – SB321 -- to create an Alzheimer's Disease Strategic Plan.

Licensed Assisted Living Facilities (otherwise known as Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly) provide good community alternatives for some Alzheimer's patients – provided that the staff is dementia capable, enabling them to adequately deal with the challenges associated with dementia. We know that dementia complicates every other disability – for example, if you have dementia and diabetes or heart disease, it is often difficult to be compliant with the care needed for those ailments, leading to medical conditions that require even more skilled care.

Another huge challenge in finding the appropriate care setting is cost – assisted living facilities are generally not affordable for low to moderate income earners. In fact, the majority of people at high risk of needing nursing home care have assets that would pay for less than one year of such care. We are already seeing a dearth of quality Medi-Cal beds in San Francisco, especially those equipped to deal with dementia patients. Given the reality of our demographics, the aging population, and the tripling of Alzheimer's cases by mid-century, the situation is only going to get worse.