



Alzheimer's and Cognition Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

“Healthy Brain Aging Starts Here”

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Handling the Holidays with Dementia

Adapted from the Lewy Body Dementia Association (LBDA), written by Melissa J. Armstrong, MD, MSc at the University of Florida.

It's the most wonderful time of the year... but it may take some extra planning and new ways of celebrating, if you live with someone with memory and thinking problems (dementia). Here are some ideas for making the holidays easier:

1. Celebrate in familiar places. It is easy for people with dementia to become confused in new places. It is often best to have family visit the person with dementia. Keeping a familiar home environment makes gatherings easier.

If you need to travel, try to pick a familiar destination. Limit the number of new situations (e.g. airports). Make use of opportunities for travelers with illnesses, such as wheelchairs and pre-boarding. Use bathrooms in advance, use family bathrooms when feasible, and consider disposable undergarments as a safety measure. Request assistance from airport staff if you need to use the bathroom and the person with dementia is not able to join you in the bathroom; this will minimize the likelihood of the person walking away and getting lost. Make sure medications are in a carry-on bag.

If you're hosting, consider whether family should stay with you. It can be helpful for visitors to stay at a nearby hotel or rental. This allows the person with dementia to have a place to retreat from visiting crowds. Visiting family should pitch in so that caregivers aren't overburdened.

2. Prepare visiting family members. If family members haven't seen the person with dementia recently, let them know the changes that have occurred. Make sure visitors have realistic expectations. Even with advance discussions, family can be surprised or upset about changes since their last visit. Be honest with family members about the difficult emotions they may experience when they see the person with dementia and what has changed.

3. Keep a schedule. Having a daily routine is important for people with dementia. Keeping to this schedule even during the holidays can be helpful. Often mornings are the best time of day for people with dementia. Plan family

Continued on page 3



Spotlight: Dr. Filley

Dr. Chris Filley grew up in a medical family. His father and uncle were doctors, and so there was a strong medical influence in his early life. But when it came time to go to college, he was unsure of his life's direction. So he went to Williams College to explore opportunities, and graduated with a degree in english, thinking he might pursue a career in the humanities.

After some reflection, however, he realized that he wanted to be able to help people in need, and finding himself attracted to biology, he went back to school at the University of Colorado – Denver to take pre-med courses so he could apply to medical school.

Dr. Filley went on to receive his medical education at Johns Hopkins University, where he became interested in neurology and how the brain works. After completing medical school, he returned to the University

Continued on page 2



**HEALTHY
BRAIN AGING**
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Cont'd: Filley Spotlight

Continued from page 1

of Colorado for his neurology residency, and here his interest in brain-behavior relationships became firmly established.

Seeking subspecialty training in this area, he then went to the Boston Veterans Administration Hospital for his behavioral neurology fellowship. After that, he was recruited back to the University of Colorado as the first behavioral neurologist at the university and in the region.

He founded the Behavioral Neurology Section in the Department of Neurology and has been gratified to see it grow into what it is today - a flourishing group of scholars, now with 25 members. He is currently director of the Behavioral Neurology Section at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

Over his career, Dr. Filley has been interested in many topics connected to brain-behavior relationships, including the dementias and traumatic brain injury (TBI). He currently serves as the senior scientific advisor for the Marcus Institute for Brain Health, a clinical and research institute dedicated to TBI, and he is a research physician for the University of Colorado Alzheimer's and Cognition Center. However, the topic of most interest to him has been the white matter and its disorders, which have fascinated him since the beginning of his career and have been a unifying theme throughout.

When Dr. Filley first began studying white matter and its disorders, white matter was not believed to play a major role in cognition and emotion, and research into this region of the brain was very limited. However, based on

research early in his career, Dr. Filley came to think that white matter was indeed important, and using an integrative approach that included the study of many white matter disorders, he introduced the concept of white matter dementia in a paper he wrote in 1988. Integrative scholarship of this kind was often challenging, particularly when prevailing opinion in neuroscience focused heavily on the study of gray matter.

He persevered in his work, and over the years the importance of white matter in human behavior has slowly but steadily gained recognition, and this part of the brain is now being vigorously studied by many investigators in this country and around the world. As a result, Dr. Filley is considered a leading expert of white matter and white matter disorders. If you would like to learn more about his work, Dr. Filley recently published an [article](#) in *The Conversation* on the importance of white matter to unlocking the brain's mysteries.

When he is not seeing patients, conducting research, or teaching, you can find Dr. Filley playing music with his group, Local Color, which features a blending of piano and cello in a variety of musical genres. He has played many musical instruments throughout his life - he grew up in a very musical family and played in a rock-n-roll band he co-founded in college.

He currently focuses on the piano, playing mostly classical music and jazz. Musician was another possible career path that Dr. Filley considered, in addition to becoming an English teacher, but he is happy (and so are we!) with his decision to follow his passion into medicine and neurology.



Cont'd: Tips for the Holidays

Continued from page 1

activities for those best times. Make sure the person with dementia gets breaks during the day for naps or time alone. Plan activities for other family members during these times. Avoid evening celebrations.

4. Involve the person with dementia. Plan activities that the person with dementia can do. People with dementia often connect with music – have a family sing-along. Decorating cookies is an easy activity to do seated. Have grandchildren play musical instruments or read a favorite Christmas book aloud. Look at old photographs. Ask the person with dementia to share a favorite holiday memory.



5. Expect a post-gathering letdown. People with dementia can sometimes rally themselves for big events or family gatherings. Afterwards, though, they may be more fatigued or more confused than usual.

Fall Webinar Series Focuses on Brain Health Equity

This fall, the University of Colorado Alzheimer's and Cognition Center (CUACC) partnered with the University of Colorado (CU) Multidisciplinary Center on Aging, the University of Colorado - Colorado Springs (UCCS) Aging Center, and the Denver Public Library to host the Healthy Aging Webinar Series.

The Healthy Aging Webinar series is held every fall and spring, and this fall's series was titled Dementia Dialogues: A Path to Equity in Brain Health. The series invited speakers who focused their presentations on discussions of equity as they pertain to brain health.

The series kicked off with Dr. Peter Pressman and four women from the African American Alzheimer's Advisory Council (4AC). The 4AC is a community advisory group that works with Dr. Pressman and the rest of the CUACC team. Through their dialogue with Dr. Pressman, they shared their experiences with dementia within the African American community and raised many important questions around equity in health care and research.

Next in the series was a 2-part webinar by JJ Jordan of Dementia Friendly Denver, where JJ covered all things dementia in her "Dementia 101" presentation. She discussed the different types of dementia, importance of

early diagnosis, and more.

Dr. Michael Korsmo, a movement disorders specialist in the CU Anschutz Department of Neurology shared the state of neurologic care in the U.S. and inequities accessing this care, in his presentation "The Global, National, and Rural Burden of Neurodegenerative Disease."

The final two presentations of the webinar series were by Dr. Brianne Bettcher of the CUACC, and Dr. Karen Orjuela, a stroke specialist in the CU Anschutz Department of Neurology. Dr. Bettcher's presentation, "Risk Factors and Prevention for Healthy Brains," covered the latest research on keeping the brain healthy and factors that put people at risk for cognitive decline.

Dr. Orjuela's presentation, "Brain Health Equity in the Hispanic/Latinx Community," focused on the social determinants of health and how they play a role in brain health and neuro-disparities in the Hispanic/Latinx community and other underrepresented communities.

If you did not have a chance to attend this webinar series and would like to watch one of the presentations, please visit the CU Multidisciplinary Center on Aging's youtube channel at <http://bit.ly/3Fzd0q2>, where recordings of the presentations are available to watch.