



ABOVE: Larry LeMaster sits with his wife and high school sweetheart, Janette, 73, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, in the living room of their Great Falls home. TRIBUNE PHOTO/LARRY BECKNER
 RIGHT: Larry feeds Janette. He brought her home from a nursing home last summer and takes care of her fulltime. BOTTOM RIGHT: Larry tries to communicate with his wife, Janette. TRIBUNE PHOTOS/AMIE THOMPSON

FORMS OF ALZHEIMER'S

» The most common form of the disease is sporadic or late-onset Alzheimer's, which occurs in people older than 65. This form accounts for about 90 percent of cases and strikes close to half of people older than 85.

» Early-onset Alzheimer's is a form of the disease that strikes those younger than 65. It is rare, accounting for less than 10 percent of Alzheimer's cases, and usually strikes people in their 40s and 50s.

» The disease sometimes runs in families, and a significant proportion of familial Alzheimer's is linked to three genes. The genes are Presenilin 1, located on chromosome 14, Presenilin 2, found on chromosome 1 and Amyloid beta precursor protein, located on the long arm of chromosome 21.

» Researchers use transgenic mice, bred to mimic all three gene mutations, to find medications to stop or slow the disease's progress. The hope is that once they find a way to control the familial form of the disease, it will work on the sporadic form. (See Monday's story for more information.)
 — Amie Thompson



Memory: Projected yearly cost of patients will be \$1.1 trillion by 2050

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In the case of the LeMasters, Larry had to use his retirement to pay for Janette's care. He said he "wasn't a billionaire by any means," but he had a reasonable retirement, "enough to get us by and do some traveling."

He didn't have long-term care insurance, though, so the entire \$4,700 a month came out of his pocket. He remembers checking into insurance 20 or 30 years ago, "but we were living paycheck to paycheck, just like everyone."

At the time, he couldn't justify the \$400- to \$500-a-month policy. "People should research it, because Alzheimer's is becoming prevalent," Larry said. "I can't believe how many people we have in Great Falls that have dementia."

The projected national yearly cost of the growing number of Alzheimer's patients will be \$1.1 trillion by 2050, Belser said. The Medicaid Waiver Pro-

gram could give some families relief. The program provides an option for those with a disability to stay in their homes, or as close to a home-like atmosphere as they can, when they face the need for extra care.

The program aims to save money as well, but the safety of the patient is top of mind, said Kelly Williams, senior and long-term care administrator for the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The state's goal since the mid-1990s has been to move individuals into the least-restrictive setting while making sure they are given proper care. This plan has worked, according to Williams, who said the percentage of empty beds in Montana nursing homes has gone up 10 percent in the past 10 years. The Medicaid Waiver Program, which is paid for by a mixture of state and federal money, is not an entitled program so not everyone who qualifies for Medicaid will receive help through the program.

A season of life

Ultimately, Larry was able to bring his wife home after about 13 months in assisted living.

"I was spending eight to nine hours a day at the nursing home because I love her, and I wanted to be with her," he said. "I never lived alone before, and I hated it."

Then Janette stopped walking one day, and Larry realized he could probably take care of her at home since she wasn't mobile. The couple's daughter and son-in-law, Lanette and Rob Brisson, agreed to move in to help Larry care for Janette.

"It's kind of like taking care of a baby. I have to feed her, and I have to change her," he said. "But she's really no problem."

Six weeks ago, Larry decided to try an experimental treatment that he researched extensively online. He is feeding Janette a tablespoon of coconut oil three times a day. Her medical doctor hadn't heard of the alternative therapy, but Janette's hospice nurse told him, "Well, Larry, you certainly don't have anything to lose."

The family says Janette has gone from saying hardly anything to communicating with them more than she has in a year and a half. The other day, while watching a game show, she answered the question before the contestant could — and she was right.



"It just makes it so much more fun to take care of her," Larry said.

Shortly after Dodi Kelley moved in with the Thompsons, she had her gallbladder removed and doctors discovered it was full of cancer and had spread beyond the organ. Dodi decided not to have the surgery the doctors recommended.

"I didn't want to spend what part of my life I have left being surgered to death," she said. "I feel good. I just want to live until I die."

As it is, Ken and Alicia say Dodi has more bad days than good.

"When it's going to be a bad day, she'll go back to bed after breakfast," Ken said.

And she asks the same question 10 times in 10 minutes.

He used to get angry about having to answer her repeated questions, until he started thinking about it from her perspective. She asked the question because she really didn't know the answer.

"You have to have patience," Ken said.

"That's the other thing," Ali-

cia added. "Mom has bad days, but I have bad days, too. Ken does, too."

The couple has learned that they have to adjust to Dodi's schedule — when she has a bad day, their plans may have to change.

But, they know it won't be like this forever.

"It's a chapter in our lives," Alicia said.

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