

# THE PLAIN DEALER

**Montessori method aids dementia patients**

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**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Beachwood -- The five elderly women seated around a table at Menorah Park took turns reading aloud from a book about the history of the chocolate chip cookie, which led to memories of baking, Malley's chocolate and songs about food.

Psychologist Cameron Camp beamed as he led them in "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree."

For that moment, the ladies, who have dementia and live in a locked unit, could have been women in a book group in a suburban home.

"Just because they don't remember anything the next day doesn't mean it was not worth having the experience," Camp said.

In the past 10 years he and his staff at the Myers Research Institute, which is housed at Menorah, have created Montessori-Based Dementia Programming, patterned on the method of teaching children developed by Maria Montessori.

It focuses on the same principles -- to help them realize their potential by building skills through a series of steps, he said. It also promotes independence.

"It's all about doing, not sitting and listening," he said.

As an example, instead of having a resident color in a book, he could make and mail a get-well card for someone in the hospital.

"It is the same motor activity, but the card has a purpose and promotes community and a meaningful social role," he said. "You just have to think differently and determine what's the purpose of the activity."

Camp's focus on maintaining the "person" in the "person with dementia" has led to international recognition and grant support from federal agencies and the Alzheimer's Association.

"It's fantastic," said Maria Carrillo, director of medical and scientific relations for the Alzheimer's Association. The association provided money for some of Camp's initial research at Menorah about seven years ago, she said.

Carrillo said Camp's work could make a difference in how families relate to relatives with dementia, especially in the late stages.

"What we most liked about his project was it enabled people to give them control over something they could do with their loved ones to enjoy that time a little more," she said.

"Instead of asking them if they remembered you, you could take a proactive role and sing a song, play the piano or do arts and crafts with them," she said. "You are not so focused on the here and whom, which they don't remember anymore. "

Camp and his staff have developed training manuals, books, games and other activities that can be used in nursing

homes, adult day care and by caregivers at home. It works for all stages of dementia.

As scientists work to unlock the mysteries of the disease, Camp works to make lives more fulfilling.

He adapted the Montessori method after his children began attending Montessori school.

"I was seeing the same connections," he said. "It is a way of preserving activities and engaging people."

While developing tasks he also capitalized on the ability of people with dementia to read, which remains even as the disease progresses because it is so learned and retained, Camp said.

A series of short books have been created that are written at the fourth-grade level, with no pictures and large, dark type only on the right hand page so readers can focus on the words. The writing is engaging and includes discussion questions and prompts for reminiscing.

Camp tests new ideas on Menorah Park residents. While they enjoyed books on Leonardo DaVinci, Gene Kelly and the history of basketball, one on the invention of penicillin was panned as uninteresting.

"We thought it was fascinating," Camp said. "The residents didn't."

Because the format of each book is the same, the procedure of reading and turning pages becomes embedded. Camp is working on training early-stage dementia patients to lead reading groups or activities using a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

"I think Dr. Camp's work has often been seen by others in the field as innovative," said George Niederehe, chief of the geriatrics research branch of NIMH. "He is taking basic principles shown in laboratory work and finding applications for them in the real world. We have been very impressed with what he has been doing."

A byproduct of the activities is that residents are less agitated and depressed.

"They are capable of learning, and when they are engaged in learning something interesting there are no behavior problems," Camp said.

The success of the programs has led to training seminars around the world. Materials have been translated into several languages, including Japanese and Mandarin, for the Montessori method is understood internationally, he said.

The first international conference on the Montessori-based programming was held in Columbus on Nov. 1. Many ideas were shared, including one from professionals in Detroit, who said casinos give stacks of used playing cards to dementia residents, who sort them into 52-card decks and send them to troops overseas, Camp said.

"You want to aim at a level that challenges but enables success," he said. "If a person with dementia lives in the moment, give them as many good moments during the day as possible."

For more information on Montessori-Based Dementia Programming and products, go to [Myersresearch.org](http://Myersresearch.org) or call 1-888-693-7774.

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