

## Dave and Lorraine: The Power of a Plan

It had been 38 years since Dave and Lorraine tied the knot; 3 children, 2 houses, and 1 family dog later, they were happily retired at 70 and living in a small Edmonton condo. Lorraine enjoyed painting, while Dave liked to play cards with his old work buddies. Recently, though, he had been spending less time with his friends and skipping his weekly games. Not only that, he'd actually been forgetting them. He was often confused at night, and he was forgetting more than cards. Sometimes he forgot where they kept the garbage bags, where they were going, or how to use the stove. Lorraine knew they had to do something when he took a wrong turn on his nightly walk and got lost – he didn't return home for several hours, and she was beside herself with worry.

After several visits to their family doctor, Dave was diagnosed with dementia. Unfortunately, the doctor didn't have much experience with dementia beyond diagnosing it. Dave and Lorraine felt anxious about what to do next, and they didn't know who else to turn to for help. Dave still seemed to be himself most of the time, but Lorraine worried that could change at any time and had no idea how to prepare. She called Health Link to see if they could help, and was quickly referred to the experts at Dementia Advice.

The dementia nurse called her back the next day and listened carefully as Lorraine described the situation, considering Dave's functioning, safety, and how Lorraine was holding up. Though not in crisis, she was very stressed; she didn't know much about dementia and felt terribly helpless.

The dementia nurse began by describing the symptoms, stages, and prognosis of dementia and referred Lorraine to Continuing Care Access for day programs that might help with her husband's increasing social withdrawal. She also provided the contact information for the Alzheimer Society's First Link program so Lorraine and Dave could explore more information and resources together. Finally, the nurse emphasized that Lorraine would need to keep taking care of herself as her husband's illness progressed, and suggested she continue painting as often as possible.

Though Lorraine still had a long road ahead, she felt infinitely less alone. Armed with knowledge she didn't have before and strategies for helping her husband through the next steps of his health journey, she felt prepared to tackle whatever might happen. The nurse's care, compassion, and clear explanations bolstered Lorraine's confidence and soothed her fears, while knowing that help was a phone call away if she needed it put Lorraine's concerns firmly to bed.