



Newsletter #7 - July 2021

Should We Return to In-Person Programs?

by

Ira Asherman

Let's Zoom "let's do a Zoom meeting". Everybody is Zooming. For some of us it was two and three Zooms a day for as much as three and four hours a day, if not more. Even today, Zoom is the communication vehicle of choice. Zoom filled a gap and played an important role in keeping us all together during this pandemic year. For dementia patients and their caregivers, of which I am one, it was even more profound. Not only were we able to stay in contact with friends and relatives but Zoom also became the vehicle for all of our programs. It became our lifeline as we no longer had access to the wide variety of in-person programs that we had come to depend upon.

Before the pandemic, many of our museums and cultural institutions held special programs for those living with Dementia and their caregivers. Additionally, Arts and Minds, The Unforgettables, Rhythm Break Cares, NYU Langone Family Support Program, and The New York Memory Center, among others, have sponsored activities and programs that addressed the needs of Dementia patients. What made all these programs special was the personal nature of each and the sense of community each established. We went to programs looking to see our friends, to sing, to dance and to touch each other. When someone was missing, we all asked why, what happened – are they Ok? The loss of anyone became a loss for us all. Even for the caregivers, these programs had value. They allowed us to talk, share experiences, hear about new programs and have a moment to just step back from the immediate issues we were facing. These programs meant the world to us. One cannot measure the value of these

sessions. I can only say that I always enjoyed them, left energized, and more importantly, so did my wife. She had the opportunity to engage in an activity that she enjoyed – be it dancing, watching dance or just listening to some good music. Most importantly, we were with people who cared about us and about whom we cared. We were with friends with people who knew our first names and people who greeted us with hugs and kisses. While all of these programs differed in content and quality, they all had one thing in common. – to improve the life of those living with Dementia.

One cannot argue the value of Zoom to the Alzheimer's community. However, Zoom is not and never will be a long-term answer. It is a one-dimensional activity. It does not provide the intimacy and warmth of the in-person meeting, and the more advanced the Dementia, the greater the need for in person activities. To make matters worse, many of the people we were caring for did not understand why we were no longer going to the in-person program. While zoom provided a vehicle, it was and never will be the same as meeting in person. It is not in its DNA.

What we need now, as the world begins to change, is to return to live and in-person sessions. We need to begin the conversation on how to make this happen. People with Alzheimer's reap a much greater benefit from in-person activities and it is for them that we must begin this conversation. No matter how hard presenters try, they cannot overcome Zoom's limitations. Zoom clearly has its advantages. Most importantly it allows you to reach a larger number of people. My hope, however, is that we remember what the objectives of all these programs are and that is to enhance the life of those living with Alzheimer's. It is not to reach more people more frequently. With that objective in mind we must find a way to return to in-person programs sooner rather than later. Zoom served a purpose and for that we say, "thank you". However, it is not a long-term answer to the needs of those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias; we must acknowledge and recognize that.

We would love to hear your views on this issue! Please write to us with your ideas, criticisms, recommendations, etc. Also, let us know if we may share your response (anonymously) in a future newsletter.

Email us at ira@ashermen.com