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## Using Humor and Creativity to Enhance the Lives of Memory Care Patients

By Kristin Sullivan

At Miami Jewish Health Systems, South Florida's largest provider of eldercare, the center for memory disorders is headed up by Dr. Marc Agronin, an expert in geriatric psychiatry, who believes that creativity and humor can outlive memory loss and can help restore meaning to patients' lives.

Along those lines, Agronin is working to help restore meaning to memory care patients' lives through a variety of techniques.

"While creativity and humor are enhanced by memory, neither skill is completely dependent upon it," Agronin explains. "Individuals with advanced Alzheimer's disease still retain sensory awareness and the ability to recognize and resonate with smiles and laughter, which serve as the basis for creativity and humor."

"I will give you two examples," Agronin continues. "We have sponsored an art therapist who is able to work with severely impaired individuals to create wonderfully colorful and inspiring paintings - works of art that we never would have imagined could emerge from their current states. Second, if you witness the daily interactions between a loving caregiver and someone with Alzheimer's disease you will see how smiling is infectious, and brings a feeling of acceptance, warmth and fun to all involved."

In addition, Miami Jewish Health System's therapeutic programming department and memory center sponsor a variety of art, music and pet therapies, as well as two outpatient programs that address a spectrum of memory impairment levels.

"At the end of the day, however, it is the warmth and dedication of the staff that best re-awakens humor and creativity in the attendees," Agronin says. "On a physiological level, meaningful activity and laughter promotes muscle relaxation and an overall state of calm through the parasympathetic nervous system, as well as the release of endorphins in the brain and decreases in stress hormones. The end result is a greater sense of well-being coupled with decreases in levels of anxiety and agitation. It also provides mental stimulation to promote attention, awakens, sensory awareness, and to optimize orientation and socialization."

Says Agronin, the author of *Alzheimer Disease and Other Dementias: A Practical Guide*, "We must never give up on individuals regardless of their place in life or just because they are old or diseased. We must involve our children and grandchildren in the process. In doing so we send a very powerful message that everyone has value and history that we must recognize and cherish. When you approach individuals suffering from advanced Alzheimer's disease with such a spirit, it is amazing what is possible."

*For more information on Miami Jewish Health Systems, please visit their [website](#).*