

When to consider memory care

By Raj Kalra, MD

One of the most difficult questions families face is when to consider memory care for a loved one living with Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia. It’s a question that rarely has a clear answer. Often, it comes after a series of small but worrying moments — a forgotten meal, a misplaced medication, or a late-night phone call because Mom can’t remember where she is. Each of these moments may seem minor on its own, but together they begin to paint a picture that it might be time for more support.

As a physician who has worked closely with seniors and families, I’ve seen how the transition to memory care, when done thoughtfully, can bring peace and stability to everyone involved. Many families wait until there’s a crisis — a fall, a hospital visit, or the realization that a loved one is unsafe alone. But memory care works best when it’s

a proactive decision, made while your loved one can still participate in the process and adjust to their new environment with comfort and dignity.

The need for memory care is often signaled not only by changes in the person living with memory loss but also by the growing exhaustion of their caregivers. Spouses and adult children often do everything they can — sometimes sacrificing their own health in the process. I’ve spoken with many families who feel torn between love and guilt, unsure when to seek help. Recognizing that caring for someone with dementia is more than a one-person job isn’t failure — it’s compassion in action.

Memory care is far more than a place to live. It’s a philosophy of care designed specifically for people with cognitive decline, blending safety, purpose, and connection. By engaging evidence-based principles of lifestyle and wellness medicine, memory care can support brain health, reduce stress, and help residents live with purpose and joy. The goal is to nurture both body and mind through daily practices that promote movement, connection, and calm — creating an environment where residents can thrive rather than simply be cared for.

Families are often surprised by how quickly their loved ones settle once they move into a supportive com-

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in care and precision stayed with him throughout his career.

Kenwood home, studio, and technique

In 2005, Parker established Parker Fine Art Gallery & Studio on Sonoma Highway in Kenwood and began painting Northern California landscapes — vineyards, hills, and skies — in oil, pastel, acrylic, and “giclée-verre” print. His work has appeared in hotels, private collections, and on wine labels for local wineries.

From his earliest years, Parker was drawn to the idea of what he called “recycling my art ... of reusing my artwork to make more art.” That fascination evolved into what he described as his “New Generations” series, in which one image gives birth to another, creating new expressions from past forms. The process, he once wrote, was like “spending time with old friends” — layering paint or photography atop earlier versions to create something entirely new.

He also experimented with photographic collages, overlapping images of landmarks such as Hood Mountain and the Carneros

wetlands into seamless panoramas, often stripped of modern structures to highlight natural forms.

Asked whether art is innate or learned, Parker laughed. “It’s more like a condition,” he said. “I really enjoy photography and drawing and painting, and I found ways to combine them that most people didn’t think about.”

Legacy and transition

Parker’s contributions have not gone unnoticed by the region’s art community. Among his long list of achievements, in 1994, he was named “Treasure Artist of the Year” by the City of Sonoma’s Cultural and Fine Arts Commission (CFAC), which honors individuals who have made significant contributions to the arts and culture of Sonoma Valley.

Yet for Parker, some of his fondest memories are the simplest. “Every evening I’d sit out back on the porch with a glass of wine and look at the mountains,” he said. “I did that almost every day for 20 years. That view has become a part of me.”

As he looks ahead, Parker is focused on family. “I’m going to get to spend time with my daughter, son, and extended family,” he said. “That’s what matters in this next chapter.”

But the previous chapter remains integral. “This has been a special life and a special place,” he said. “All of my life has been interesting — Pasadena, Santa Barbara, Davis — but Sonoma Valley has been home.”

For more on Parker’s artwork, visit www.parkerfineart.com; or contact him directly at fredparker100@gmail.com or (707) 833-2602.

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munity. There’s a sense of relief when meals are shared, medications are managed, and compassionate care is always nearby. Residents begin to smile again, engage in activities, and rediscover small joys that had been lost in the confusion of daily life at home.

Deciding to move a loved one into memory care is never easy, but waiting too long can make the transition harder. Visiting communities early, asking questions, and learning about their philosophy of care can remove much of the fear and uncertainty. The best time to consider memory care is before it’s urgently needed — when you still have the ability to make choices calmly, rather than react during a crisis.

At its core, this decision is about love — about creating an environment where your loved one can live safely, comfortably, and with dig-

nity. Memory care isn’t the end of independence; it’s the beginning of a new kind of support that honors who a person is and who they have always been.

If you or someone you love is beginning to experience memory changes, know that you are not alone. There are compassionate resources and communities like Aroha Memory Care coming soon to Sonoma County, dedicated to helping families find peace of mind and purpose in every stage of the journey.

Dr. Raj Kalra is a physician and founder of Aroha Memory Care by MD Senior Wellness, a new memory care community in Sonoma Valley that integrates lifestyle medicine and wellness into senior living. The grand opening is scheduled for November 21, 2025. For more information, visit www.mdseniorwellness.com.

Puzzle
Answers
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Events

Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.: Pizza & Jug Wine at Wellington

Wellington Cellars invites guests to savor Pizza & Jug Wine Sundays. Visitors can indulge in signature jug wines and gourmet pizzas from the Red Rooster Pizza Truck amid the scenic beauty of Wine Country. Enjoy relaxed charm with flavorful indulgence — an ideal weekend escape. Wellington Cellars is at 11600 Dunbar Rd. in Glen Ellen.

Wednesday evenings through Oct. 29: Acoustic Sunsets

Sonoma Botanical Garden extends its hours until 7 p.m. every Wednesday, through Oct. 29 for its Acoustic Sunset series. Each week features a different live music set by Bay Area bands starting at 5 p.m. in the amphitheater. The Garden welcomes well-behaved, leashed dogs, encourages picnics, and offers lawn games and other family-friendly activities, including the chance to experience the Winged Wonders exhibition on a warm summer evening. Come together surrounded by the beauty of the Garden. Acoustic Sunsets is free for members and included with Garden admission for non-members. For more information, visit www.sonomabg.org.

Daily through Oct. 31: Winged Wonders

A fantastical flock of giant bamboo birds has landed at Sonoma Botanical Garden. Discover 12 whimsi-

cal, larger-than-life sculptures of native species created by the Myth Makers. Enjoy a playful celebration of the birds that call the Garden’s grasslands, forests, and vineyards home. Sonoma Botanical Garden is located at 12841 Sonoma Hwy. in Glen Ellen.

Oct 15: Glen Ellen-Kenwood Rotary Club meeting

Guests are welcome at Rotary Club meetings at the Kenwood Depot, 314 Warm Springs Rd., Kenwood, on the first and third Wednesday of every month from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Visit www.glenellenkenwoodrotary.com for more information. The speaker at the October 15 meeting will be District 1 Supervisor Rebecca Hermosillo.

Oct 16: Botanical Garden Family Yoga

Sonoma Botanical Garden’s Family Yoga sessions are designed to be fun, memorable, and a meaningful way for parents and children to connect. Through breathwork, mindful games, and beginner-friendly yoga poses, families can explore movement and mindfulness together in a welcoming, low-pressure environment. The family yoga session at the Garden is \$10 for adult members, \$15 for adult non-members, and \$5 for children (members and non-members). The fee includes admission to Sonoma Botanical Garden. For more information and to sign up, visit the Garden’s calendar at

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