

# Press Release:

## ***“How to Communicate with Alzheimer’s: A Practical Guide & Workbook for Families”***

***by Susan Kohler MS, CCC-SLP***

Dr. Roger M. Lee, Santa Monica/UCLA Medical Center: “Taking care of persons with Alzheimer’s disease can be very challenging. The emphasis of good communication is vitally important as demonstrated in this book...”

Diane Stillwell Weinberg, Caregiver: “Your wonderful, wonderful book! I am just knocked out by this book. It is just what I need...”

Judy Wunsch, Former Caregiver and Director of Volunteers’ Alzheimer’s Association, Los Angeles/San Bernadino Counties: “...This book will help to fill a void in the literature of Alzheimer’s caring.”

Valen J. Tanner, Friend of Alzheimer’s patient: “It is informative with compassion. It’s my belief that wherever there is a need, this book will have a profound and significant impact. In my opinion, this book is elite resource material.”

Do not take our communication process for granted! Especially if you are living with someone who has Alzheimer’s, other related dementias, confusion or memory loss; the simple act of communication can be challenging between you and your loved one. Author, Susan Kohler, has worked "in the trenches" with the elderly population in health care settings for over 15 years. She knows how to help you create satisfying connections through her amazing book, “How to Communicate with Alzheimer’s.”

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Susan created a How-To-Book with the needs of the caregiver in mind. It’s designed with a strong ring binding, so that you can lay it open on a table, read the information carefully and quickly refer to places of interest and learning. In this amazing and helpful book you will gain knowledge and insight on topics such as:

- What’s So Important About Communication
- The Deterioration of Communication Skills in the Progression of Dementia and What To Do About It
- Communication Strengths of Persons with Alzheimer’s and Dementia
- Communicating Strategies
- Activities You Can Do
- Troubleshooting Difficult Behavior
- Understanding Your Role
- Where To Go For Help

Susan is a licensed/certified Speech-Language Pathologist, dedicating time as a researcher at UCLA, hospitals and nursing homes, focusing on communication issues between family and professional caregivers and the frail elderly. Her experience has gained her recognition in lecturing and training on the subject of communication with this population, including published work and a training video on communicating with the cognitively impaired. Susan is also a member of the Screen Actors Guild and works professionally as an actress and singer, skills she attributes to laying the ground work for developing the techniques of making “connections” with persons who suffer from dementia. She currently resides in Santa Monica, CA. This would be an amazing interview.

# A Personal Reflection

**M**y passion for the elderly goes back to my childhood – the older adult as story teller always captivated me whenever one spoke. After completing my masters in speech pathology, I took the road less traveled by my peers and wanted to work with the elderly. Something drove me to this, something I couldn't articulate. Then it all made sense to me one day when I saw an elderly woman in a wheelchair repeating babbled utterances, sitting motionless, face expressionless. Initially I felt sad. What seemed even more heartbreaking, was the way everyone simply walked on by, ignoring her. I was charting at the nurse's station, and looked up just in time for her eyes to meet mine. I was immediately moved to say "Good Morning!" The woman instantly broke into a smile. A broad, vibrant smile and effortlessly replied, "Thank you." A seemingly unintelligible individual was able to respond to a simple, social gesture and make a "human connection," a pleasant exchange felt by both parties. My passion for working with the elderly, now clearly defined by their need to stay "connected" to other human beings, was in full swing.

— Susan Kohler, MSCCCLP

## Questions and Topics

1. Sometimes I hear my mother/father repeating questions over and over. I want to scream. What can I do to stop these repetitive questions?
2. When I come into the room and the person with dementia doesn't recognize me, how do I deal with them and my own personal pain of not being recognized?
3. There are times I want to correct them when they say something wrong or something that just doesn't make sense. Should I correct them or just go with their reality?
4. How did this passion for the elderly, especially those with dementia, develop?
5. Is it ever depressing for you to work with this population? How do you deal with all of this sickness around you?
6. How do you bring your experience as an actress and singer into your work with the elderly?
7. If there is one technique that would have the greatest impact to create the emotional connection needed for caregivers and their loved ones, what would it be?
8. What are the positive effects to be gained by using good communication techniques with persons who suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia?
9. The book clearly states that it offers "techniques." How does that differ from other publications that label these efforts as "tips?"
10. Why did you write this book?
11. How does society play a role in the isolation of this population (persons with dementia)?
12. How does technology impact our ability to make connections with others, especially those with impaired communication skills?
13. Who is at risk of having this disease? What age do signs and symptoms typically manifest? What are the signs?
14. Are there new medications that slow down the speed of the disease?

# Biography

Susan Kohler is a licensed and certified Speech-Language Pathologist in the southern California area. She has been working “in the trenches” primarily with the elderly population in hospitals, home and Adult Day Health Care settings for over 15 years. Susan’s experience with Alzheimer’s and dementia has gained her recognition in lecturing and training on the subject of communication with this population. The techniques in Ms. Kohler’s book are the central focus with UCLA’s research project, “Therapeutic Communication during Nursing Home Care,” which addresses communication issues between nursing home staff and frail, older residents.

Susan is also a dynamic actress and singer, and attributes this training to enhancing her skills as a therapist working with the frail elderly. Susan also brings her fellow artist friends to perform, and visit with patients and residents at her facilities. The responses still amaze her: what seemed to be withdrawn, lifeless individuals, emerged into smiling, laughing, singing and interactive human beings. She believes “human connection” is vital to stimulating positive experiences of communication, sharing, bonding, building self-esteem and wellness in persons that many think cannot understand or express their ideas and interests.

*“Working with the elderly has brought inspiration to my other projects, helping to express the potential of the human spirit.” — Susan Kohler*

