

*A Salute to Professionals in Dementia Care*

**Elisha Smith, BSN, RN, Madison**

**A Professional Calling**

Elisha earned his Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in 2014 from the University of Wisconsin- Madison. His passion for his field comes from his family. “My mom aspired to be a nurse,” Elisha shared. “And although she did not finish college, she was passionate about the field, and inspired me to pursue my degree.” Elisha also had a twin brother who suffers from asthma, and sadly died from an asthma attack at the age of 10. “I had exposure to healthcare and the world of nursing early on,” said Elisha. “I also volunteered at a hospital in Chicago during high school. It all brought it together for me.”



He is pursuing his Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Degree in the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner program at University of Wisconsin- Madison. He is currently a float pool nurse at UW Health on medical-surgical units and a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the School of Nursing.

**Dementia Care Beyond the Hospital**

As a part of Elisha’s DNP degree, he completed an internship with the Alzheimer’s Association to better understand community support for people living with dementia. “Prior to my internship, I felt like I knew what it was like to take care of someone with dementia, but the experience provided a huge eye opener,” Elisha shared. “Dementia care goes well beyond the hospital setting. Learning about the pressures and challenges of caregivers was invaluable. Also learning about the resources available from the Alzheimer’s Association and other ancillary organizations in Wisconsin was amazing. The experience truly helped me feel more confident in my ability to guide patients and families in navigating the dementia space, and sharing the full scope of resources available.”

Elisha served as a Community Educator during his internship. He taught core virtual educational programs including Understanding Alzheimer’s and Dementia and Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s. He plans to continue volunteering as a Community Educator for the Alzheimer’s Association.

As part of his doctoral work, Elisha also has a research component to complete. His focus is on a patient-centered care program for those living with dementia.

## **Dementia hits Home**

Elisha has a personal connection to dementia, as his paternal grandmother was diagnosed in June 2020. Living apart from most of her family in Mississippi, they weren't there to recognize early signs, namely memory loss and challenges with medication management.

"It was a whirlwind when we first started having concerns about her," Elisha shared. "Our initial reaction was that it can't be dementia." Elisha was doing his internship with the Alzheimer's Association when she was diagnosed. He took advantage of the 24/7 Helpline to find local resources to support her, until she was able to move closer to family. He shared the resources with his family on a video call so everyone could rally behind her. She has since moved closer to family and has plans to move to a memory care facility.

## **A Need for Awareness**

"A person living with dementia can still have a life of quality," shared Elisha. "The diagnosis of dementia does not have to rob the person and their family of joy, fun, and purpose. There is such a stigma tied to dementia, but don't ignore your concerns. It's OK to ask questions. Rally behind your loved one and engage resources to support them."