

Sixty-four employees of the Imperial Manor and Parkview/Heights experienced the symptoms of dementia at a two-day program last week.

Tammy Simpson, Director of Nursing, said every staff member working at the facilities took part in a “dementia tour” with Shandy Loberg of O’Neill, Neb.

Not only did the nurses and other direct caregivers go through the program, but so did the manager and other employees in the housekeeping, dietary and maintenance departments, as well.

Through use of an ipad, earphones and other equipment, the employees were made to experience conditions that often come with dementia such as macular degeneration, arthritis and memory loss.

“It was truly a unique awakening,” Simpson said.

“It was very emotional and has helped all of us realize what someone with dementia goes through,” she added.

Staff members were told that it takes someone with dementia five times longer to process a task compared to someone without dementia.

They also learned that people with dementia have feelings of anger, depression and discouragement. Support groups often can help.

Dementia is often incorrectly considered a disease, but actually refers to a group of symptoms that negatively affect memory and social abilities, resulting in an interference with daily functioning.

Primarily, problems with memory and impaired judgment or language are the two major areas affected by dementia.

However, numerous other causes and symptoms of dementia exist, which can make diagnosis and treatment difficult or even impossible.

In order for an individual to be classified as having dementia, two or more of the following functions must be significantly impaired: memory, communication and language, ability to focus/pay attention, reasoning and judgment, and visual perception. More often than not, these symptoms begin slowly and gradually worsen.

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia, accounting for 60 to 80 percent of cases, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

It is important to note that Alzheimer’s is not a part of normal aging. Alzheimer’s worsens over time, with early symptoms including difficulty remembering names and events, apathy and depression, and later symptoms that include impaired judgment, confusion, behavior changes and difficulty walking, speaking or swallowing.

There is no cure for Alzheimer’s disease, but some treatments are available and can slow the progression to improve quality of life.

Another common type of dementia is Parkinson’s disease. Parkinson’s is a progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects movement. It is often characterized by tremor, muscle stiffness, slow movements or impaired balance.

Unfortunately, there are no treatments available to slow or stop the brain damage that occurs from Parkinson’s disease dementia. Rather, current treatments focus on reducing symptoms.

Approximately 5.2 million Americans have Alzheimer’s disease or some other form of dementia. Experts estimate that this number will rise to 13.8 million by 2050. Concurrently, the cost of treating these conditions is increasing at a similar rate.

Recently, a new study from the Alzheimer's Association found that one in three seniors die with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. Loberg indicated the informational program here last Tuesday and Wednesday involved more people than any of her other presentations.

Simpson said Loberg's Imperial program, and others she gives across the state, are possible through grant funds. Therefore, there was no direct cost to the Manor and Parkview/Heights.