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Editorial | Baker Act facility needs dementia patient care provisions

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COMPASSIONATE CARE

THE ISSUE: *Local dementia care advocate suggests dementia-specific model for Baker Act facility.*

OUR OPINION: *Listen to Debbie Selsavage; she is an expert.*

Mental health care is delicate.

Few know the fragility of and compassion needed in such care quite like Debbie Selsavage, Citrus County's own top dementia care advocate and expert.

Selsavage, a certified trainer and consultant, and a dementia practitioner who formed Coping with Dementia LLC after the journey of caring for her late husband, Albert, recently made a plea to the county to get its proposed Baker Act facility right — with proactive provisions for those taken in with dementia and Alzheimer's.

Drawing on her own experiences with her husband's dementia (who was Baker Acted twice), she urges the county to make careful considerations when preparing to intake dementia and Alzheimer's patients into Baker Act care.

Everyone involved with the eventual construction and staffing of a Baker Act facility would be wise to embrace Selsavage's plea. She is right and her suggestions are smart.

Selsavage believes individuals with dementia should never be admitted into a general population where noise, aggressive behavior and over-stimulation is likely to cause great emotional stress and possibly even physical injury. She suggests the future Baker Act facility in Citrus have a segregated area for those suffering with the disease, including screening areas, admission and holding procedures in place that work to soothe the causes of “dementia behaviors.” That includes an area free of loud noise and designed not to look like a jail cell.

Her plan also includes dementia-specific training sessions for Baker Act facility staff and first responders to learn how to identify and interpret dementia behaviors, and how to respond appropriately and effectively.

Those charged with the facility design and staff training should seek Selsavage’s council. Her knowledge is vast and she thinks of all things dementia in a proactive way, seeing a need where many of our local leaders would not, simply because they haven’t had the same experiences.

Over the years, Selsavage has become a passionate trailblazer, helping society better understand and cope with the challenges of those afflicted by dementia. She believes in a better way to treat those with dementia, and she actively works to find solutions and spread awareness in the Citrus community.

Her ideas and strategies to improve care for those battling dementia and Alzheimer’s are cutting edge, and not only benevolently aim to provide a better quality of life for patients, but for their caregivers as well.

She envisions Citrus County as a model for compassionate and enlightened treatment, and the Board of County Commissioners and Lifestream would be astute to take advantage of her consultancy.