A few suggestions for managing the financial and care options for a loved one with dementia

1. Finances:
   Joint bank accounts – check to be sure that both individuals on a joint account are considered primary owners of the account. This will probably need to be done in person with both individuals named on the account. (After having a joint account for 49 years, I found that our account could only be accessed through Joe's electronic credentials as he was the "Primary holder" of the account. We were able to set up access for me, making us joint owners [probably not the correct lingo] but only by going to the bank.)

   Credit cards – a "joint" credit card probably only has one "owner of the account" and thus the second person on the account has no credit history through this account. If your spouse has dementia, you should have your own credit card so that you can build "credit history".

2. Banking:
   *****Adult children should have access to an account that will allow them to pay their parents living expenses in the event that the ******healthy parent becomes incapacitated. Some families choose to add an adult child as a signatory on the parent's joint bank account, others may choose to set up a separate "emergency fund" bank account with the "healthy parent" and the adult child. This should be discussed with a lawyer, financial planner, or accountant.

   It is important to know that in order to add signatories to a bank account ALL parties listed on the account must sign the requisite forms. This includes the deceased – for real; which means that it is not possible to add a child to a parent's joint account if one of the parents has died or is incapacitated. It can take months to set up a new bank account and redirect all automatic deposits and withdrawals.

   Adult children should also be aware of **all** of their parent's sources of income: social security, pensions, retirement accounts, investment accounts, and any real estate. They should have the contact info for their tax accountant, financial manager, and/or lawyer.

3. Power of attorney – financial and medical.

   Adult children should have this for both parents. If this is not in place and something happens to either parent, the adult child may have to petition the courts to grant them guardianship for the parent in order to make medical and financial decisions – this is expensive.

   A will does not proscribe any action until the person has died. An adult child has no special status with regards to medical decision making for their parents.

4. Mid to late stage dementia – it is important to discuss the long term plan early. There are 2 options – 24 hour care at home or transfer to a facility. Both are disruptive, difficult, and expensive, and one or the other will probably be necessary. Discuss now what events will drive the decision to move to total care.

Common issues for the parent with dementia include:

- Wandering – and thus getting lost
- Inability to manage bathing and hygiene
- Extreme anxiety such that the healthy parent has difficulty being out of sight,
- Sundown syndrome
- Disruptive sleep patterns
- Combative behavior

Common issues with the healthy parent include:

- Depression
- Inability to sleep
- Inability to work and or care for their own needs

Set the bar now, define those events that will determine the need for total care and whether it will be in the home (24 hour care) or in a facility. If possible this discussion should take place with all of the involved family members.

5. Explore total care options – hopefully well before total care is needed:

    - Speak with others who have gone both routes
    - Evaluate the cost of each and what finances will allow
    - Visit facilities in the area – if possible ask to speak with relatives of patients in the facility. Speak with the staff and notice how the staff treat the patients.

    In considering in-home care, keep in mind that the healthy parent will be essentially managing a team of caregivers. Although the caregivers are usually from an agency, they are in the home and the healthy parent will be responsible for ensuring that they perform as expected and that they have all of the supplies they need to perform their job (e.g., enough sheets and towels, hygiene supplies, foods that are easily eaten, etc.). They will also be responsible for care if the caregiver does not show up as well as orientating new caregivers. Some 24 hour home care services offer additional types of support and oversight including an RN to assess care and provide feedback on a regular basis, or caregivers who will shop and/or do housework as needed.

6. **PLAN B**
    Know how you will handle the following events:

    - The healthy parent suddenly becomes unable to care for the other parent (E.g., falls and needs short term rehab before returning home or needs to be hospitalized for any reason).
    - The healthy parent tells you that they feel they can no longer adequately care for the other parent or that they feel overwhelmed
    - The healthy parent tells you something that indicates they are no longer able to safely care for the other parent or themselves
    - One of the key previously determined events has occurred

Points to consider in the discussion of how to handle the above include:

- Who (locally) can immediately take over the needs of the parent with dementia, arrange for 24 hour care, monitor to ensure that the caregivers are present and have all they need to care for the parent until a family member is able to arrive
- Who can take charge of the finances and maintain the house while one parent is in rehab and the other in respite care
- What rehab and respite care facilities are available

7. Dementia affects the entire family. It is important to care for yourselves and each other. Know the support systems in your parent's community and your own community, neighbors, and friends, church. This is difficult – there are no easy answers, and often no "good" options. You need all the help you can get.

*Adult child refers to anyone who is the support person for the "Healthy Parent" and thus "plan B" when the healthy parent becomes incapacitated

**Healthy parent refers to any individual who becomes the support person for an individual with dementia. Eg, spouse niece, nephew, cousin, close friend