


Dementia Diagnosis and Related Behaviors

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Current Statistics Related to Dementia Disorders

- Currently an estimated 6.5 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease.
- More than 55 million people live with dementia worldwide, and there are nearly 10 million new cases every year.
- It is more common now due to the overall population growth and the aging of our population.



Overview of Dementia

- “I know I love you but I don’t remember who you are.”
- Dementia is defined as the decline in cognition – learning, memory, language, social skills, judgement, and problem solving.
- It interferes with daily functioning.
- Progresses slowly.
- Increased incidence with advanced age.
- Caused by abnormal changes in the brain.



Symptoms

- Memory loss, usually noticed by a spouse or someone else.
- Difficulty communicating or finding words.
- Difficulty with visual and spatial abilities- i.e. getting lost while driving
- Difficulty reasoning or problem-solving
- Difficulty handling complex tasks
- Difficulty with planning and organizing
- Difficulty with coordination and motor function
- Confusion and disorientation



Psychological Changes

- Changes in personality/emotions
- Depression
- Anxiety



Types of Dementia

- Neurodegenerative disorders result in a progressive and irreversible loss of neurons and brain function.
- Currently no cure for these disorders



Types of Dementia

- **Alzheimer's disease** (plaques and neurofibrillary tangles interfere with the transmission of neurochemicals within the brain).
- **Frontotemporal Dementia** (damage to neurons in the frontal and temporal parts of the brain).
- **Lewy body dementia** (combination of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease)
- **Vascular dementia** (results from small strokes, changes in the blood flow within the brain)
- **Mixed dementia** (combination of two or more dementias)



Current Treatments

- **Cholinesterase inhibitors:** donepezil (Aricept), rivastigmine (Exelon) and galantamine (Razadyne).
- Boosts the levels of a chemical messenger involved in memory and judgement.



Current Treatments

- **Memantine** (Namenda): works to boost a different chemical messenger in the brain. Often combined with cholinesterase inhibitors.
- **Aducanumab** (Aduhelm) is an amyloid beta-directed antibody indicated to treat Alzheimer's disease. It initiates a reduction of amyloid beta plaque in the brain. Aduhelm is approved under the accelerated approval pathway, which provides patients with a serious disease earlier access to drugs when there is an expectation of clinical benefit despite some uncertainty about the clinical benefit.



Current Treatments

- **Other medications:** antidepressants, medications for sleep disturbances.
- **Occupational therapists:** ways to make the home safer
- **Modification of the environment:** reduce clutter, monitoring systems
- **Support for caregivers:** respite, support groups, home health assistance
- **Nothing is curative at this time, the medications simply slow the progression.**

Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Behavioral change may have triggers
- Pain or discomfort , over-stimulation, fear or frustration, unfamiliar surroundings, complicated tasks





Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Detect and connect**
- Try to see the world through their eyes
- What took place prior to the behavior?
- Approach the person calmly and respectfully



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Address physical needs first**
- Medical issues
- Physical problems such as: hunger or thirst, lack of social interaction, environmental triggers for discomfort (too hot, too cold)



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Then address the emotional needs
- Focus on the person's feelings not facts
- Use your knowledge of the person's preferences to provide effective interventions.
- Redirect the energy into a more soothing activity



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Reassess and plan for the next time**
- Go back to detecting and connecting
- Join the person's reality
- What went well and what didn't?
- How can you make adjustments?



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Anxiety or agitation
- Restlessness or pacing
- Distress
- Over-reliance on caregivers



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Confusion or suspicion**
- Not recognizing familiar people, places or things
- Accusing others of theft, infidelity, etc.
- **Aggression**



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Aggressive behavior may be verbal or physical
- Can occur suddenly for no apparent reason
- May emerge following a trigger



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Usually, aggressive behaviors associated with dementia are upsetting but not dangerous.
- Occasionally the person is a danger to themselves or others and safety measures are necessary.
- Speak with their physician about medical interventions.



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Call 911 when help is urgently needed.
- **Repetition**
 - Saying something over and over, repeating words, questions or behaviors.
- **Wandering**
 - 60% of people with dementia will wander, and it can happen at any stage without warning.



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Communication**
- Positive mood for interaction
- Get the person's attention
- State your message clearly



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Ask simple, answerable questions
- Listen with your eyes, ear, and heart
- Break down activities in a series of steps
- When the going gets tough, distract and redirect
- Respond with affection and reassurance
- Remember the good old days
- Maintain your sense of humor



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Handling troubling behavior**
- You cannot change the person- try to accommodate the behavior, not control the behavior.
- Remember you can change your behavior.
- Check with your health care provider- is there an underlying medical reason?



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Behavior has a purpose- cannot express their wants or needs.
- Behavior is triggered- it has a reason
- What works today, may not work tomorrow



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- **Wandering**
- May be related to boredom, medication side effects, or to look for “something” or someone.
- May also be related to a physical need: thirst, hunger, a need to use the toilet, or exercise.



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Make time for regular exercise to minimize restlessness
- Consider installing new locks that require a key
- Position locks high or low on the door (beyond eye level is helpful)



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Try a barrier like a curtain or colored streamer to mask the door. A “*stop*” sign or “*do not enter*” sign may also help.
- Place a black mat or paint a black space on your front porch; this may appear to be an impassable hole to the person with dementia.
- Add “child-safe” plastic covers to doorknobs



Dealing with Dementia Related Behaviors

- Consider installing a home security or monitoring system designed for someone with dementia.
- GPS technology for the individual (watch or clipped on clothing/belt)
- Put away essential items such as the individuals coat, purse, or glasses.
- Have them wear an ID bracelet and sew ID labels into their clothing.
- Tell neighbors about your relative's wandering behavior, and make sure they have your phone number.