

## Caring for Hospice Patients with Alzheimer's Disease or Other Related Dementias

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## Objectives

- Differentiate from normal aging and Alzheimer's disease
- Name at least two symptoms of dementia
- List three Hospice Aide interventions appropriate for the patient who has dementia and the family

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## Dementia

- In 2012, Hospice patients with a diagnosis of dementia accounted for 37% of hospice patients
- Dementia isn't a specific disease. It describes a group of symptoms affecting intellectual and social abilities severely enough to interfere with daily functioning
- It's caused by conditions or changes in the brain
- Different types of dementia exist, depending on the cause
- Alzheimer's disease is the most common type

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### Causes of Reversible Dementia

- Medication
- Infection
- Medical conditions
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Poisoning
- Heart and lung disease

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### Types of Dementia

- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular dementia-may occur after a stroke.  
High B/P may be a factor, or infection of the heart valve
- Dementia pugilistica- Boxer's dementia
- HIV- associated dementia
- Secondary dementias

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### Risk Factors

- Age & Family history
- Blood pressure
- Diabetes
- High estrogen levels
- Alcohol use
- Smoking
- Atherosclerosis

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### Complications of Dementia

- Nutrition deficits
- Hygiene deterioration
- Medication adherence
- Communication challenges
- Insomnia
- Safety
- Emotional problems
- Delirium

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### Common Signs & Symptoms of Dementia

- Memory loss
- Difficulty communicating
- Inability to learn or remember new information
- Difficulty with planning and organizing
- Difficulty with coordination and motor functions

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### Common Signs & Symptoms of Dementia-continued

- Personality changes
- Inability to reason
- Inappropriate behavior
- Paranoia
- Agitation
- Hallucinations

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### Exercise

- Ms. Blue is a hospice patient with end stage lung cancer and dementia. She has always been a very gentle and polite lady. Today, she doesn't know the hospice aide and can't put on her socks or button her shirt. How do you respond to this change in her ability to function?
- What do you report?

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### What is Alzheimer's Disease

- It is a physical illness
- Results from changes in the brain
- It is a form of dementia

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### Prevalence of Alzheimer's Disease

- 5.2 million people in the US have Alzheimer's
- Almost 66% of people with Alzheimer's are women
- By 2050, estimate the number of people with Alzheimer's will triple from 5 million to 16 million
- 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in US
- Kills more people than prostate and breast cancer combined
- Approximately 75% of all dementia is Alzheimer's

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### Is it Old Age or Alzheimer's Disease

- Memory loss can be a part of growing older
- True memory loss is not a normal part of aging
- Occasional forgetfulness is a normal part of aging-- the difference is the ability to re-call
- Alzheimer's symptoms become worse over time and can be severe
- Alzheimer's disease leads to changes in personality, behavior, and abilities

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### What is Normal and What Could be Alzheimer's Disease

#### Normal Aging

Periodic Forgetfulness

Forgetting where car keys were left

Forgetting a friend's birthday

Occasionally misplacing items

#### Could be Something More

Forgetfulness interferes with daily functioning

Forgetting what to do with car keys

Difficulty recognizing friends and family

Putting things in strange places  
e.g. putting iron in refrigerator

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### What Causes Alzheimer's Disease

- No one knows
- Physical changes take place in the brain
- Plaques and tangles form in the brain
- Brain cells which send messages to each other - called "neurons" can not relay the messages as well because of plaques and tangles

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### Signs and Symptoms of Early Alzheimer's Disease

- Loss of short-term memory
- Repeat things often
- Misplace things
- Forget how to get to familiar places
- Have difficulty communicating (forget the right word)

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### Manifestations of Early to Middle Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

- Forget familiar things such as people's names, phone numbers, what month it is
- Lose interest in favorite activities
- Feel more suspicious
- Feel stressed when making decisions

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### Severe or Late Stage Alzheimer's Disease

- Needs help to eat
- Needs help to stand and walk
- Needs help to use the bathroom
- Touches or pats things over and over
- Sleeping more often
- Speaking less and less
- Responding less frequently

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### Can Alzheimer's Disease be Treated?

- The disease can not be cured
- Treatment is aimed at the symptoms
- Medications can help with memory problems, behavior, wandering, restlessness and depression

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### Exercise

- You are taking care of Mr. Smith, who is in end-stage Alzheimer's disease. His daughter is visiting from another state. As you are working with Mr. Smith, his daughter says to you. "Do you think my dad will get better?"
- How would you respond?

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### Hospice Eligibility

- Complete dependence on others for daily activities
- Incontinence
- Near-total inability to communicate (may say only a few words) or may be non-verbal
- One of several medical conditions, such as pneumonia or bedsores, in the past year
- Weight loss
- Shortness of breath
- Bedridden

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### The Hospice Aide's role in Monitoring Health Problems

- Report the following:
  - Bowel movement problems such as constipation
  - Changes in sleep patterns
  - Difficulty eating or refusal to eat
  - Weight changes
  - Decline in activity
  - Skin irritations or breakdown
  - Urinary incontinence
  - Dehydration
  - Swallowing difficulties

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### What is Your Role As a Hospice Aide

- Make allowances
- Show interest
- Avoid distractions and noise
- Keep things simple
- Don't interrupt
- Use a calm, relaxed tone of voice

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### What is Your Role As a Hospice Aide-Continued

- Use visual cues to help with recognition
- Limit choices
- Stick to a routine
- Explain before doing
- Suggest having night lights especially in halls and bathrooms
- Remove clutter
- Report signs of caregiver stress

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### Caregiver Stress

- Patients with Alzheimer's disease may sleep a lot during the day and be up at night, therefore the caregivers are up all night
- Patients may be agitated and caregivers may be treated less than nice
- Caregivers may not take care of themselves
- Caregivers may be emotionally and physically exhausted

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### Caregiver Stress: What to Report

- Sleep pattern changes
- Tired all the time
- Less talkative
- Withdrawn
- Crying a lot
- Sad affect
- Verbalizes fears associated with impending death of patient

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### Interventions to Use With Caregivers

- Be there for them!
- Listen! Listen!
- Emotional support
- Encourage to take care of themselves
- Encourage respite
- Report significant observations/findings to the nurse
- Document your actions

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### Exercise

- Mr. White is a hospice patient diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease several years ago. He is now always in bed and says only a few words during a day. When leaving the home of Mr. White, you notice his wife crying.
- What would you do?

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### Summary

- Alzheimer's disease is most common type of dementia
- A patient with Alzheimer's disease receiving hospice services is in the late stages of the disease process
- As the disease progresses the patient may become totally dependent for care
- Caregiver may become exhausted and burned out
- Respite care may be helpful

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