

“Lead From Where You Stand”



EXTRA Research Project: Reducing Antipsychotic Medications



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Module 4: Communication and Dementia

Communication:

“...how we share our ideas, needs, and feelings with one another.”

Danielle Ripich

“Alzheimer’s Disease Communication Guide”



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- communication with a person who has dementia is often difficult due to the effect of the dementia on the brain
- dementia affects speech and the use of words, as well as understanding of the words heard



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The person with dementia may experience difficulties with word-finding and may:

- forget names of people, places and objects
- repeat words and phrases
- invent words to “fill the gap”
- jumble words into a “word salad” that makes no sense
- forget more complex words
- experience that “tip of the tongue” feeling



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Other than difficulties with word-finding, the person with dementia may:

- use “empty” social phrases to fill in for meaningful conversation
- find it hard to express thoughts in complete sentences
- have difficulty staying “on track” in a conversation



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- repeat the same questions or phrases
- have difficulty understanding what is being said
- have difficulty starting a conversation
- have difficulty following verbal/written directions



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EXERCISE:

- Without using any words for food or drink, try and describe what you had for dinner last night.



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Barriers to Communication

The effects of dementia on communication are often made more difficult by:

- visual/hearing impairments
- the environment
- perception of reality
- culture
- personal history
- emotions
- changes in personality



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Communicating with a person with dementia requires:

- an understanding of the importance of communication
- an understanding of the effects of dementia
- the skills to be creative and find ways to communicate
- the patience to slow down, listen, allow time for a response
- a belief that in every person is that core self that can still be reached



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“people with Alzheimer’s respond best to those who still treat them as adults, regardless of the disability.”

What You Need to Know about Alzheimer’s
J. Medina



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Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

We need to remember that communication isn't just verbal.

- non-verbal communication may be even more important
- as they lose their ability to communicate verbally, individuals with dementia seem to become increasingly sensitive to non-verbal communication



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Communication is:

- verbal 7%
- tone of voice 38%
- body language 55%



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We need to be aware of the non-verbal communication the resident is using, as well as the nonverbal communication we use

- Listen for the resident's tone of voice. What emotions do you hear reflected in their tone? Watch their body language. What are you seeing?
- How does our nonverbal communication affect the resident? eg. our tone of voice? our body language?



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Communication as a Need

- the need to communicate is exactly that...a need.
- we try very hard to meet other needs for residents, such as the need for food, sleep, elimination, warmth, etc.
- how well are we meeting the resident's need for communication?



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Consider the need to communicate, and identify any difficulties in communication. Ask yourself:

- what is the resident doing to try to communicate?
 - remember, all behaviour has meaning
- what are we doing to try and communicate?
 - if it's not working, do I try something different?



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Communication Guidelines

When communicating with someone with dementia, the following guidelines are helpful:

- approach using a gentle manner
 - speak gently
 - make sure they can see you
- speak to the person as an adult



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- use the person's preferred name
- use short sentences and familiar words
- make questions into simple statements
- provide limited choices
- be aware of body language and tone of voice
 - the resident's and yours
- take time to listen
- allow time for a response



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- face the person
- remove distractions
- do not argue or try to correct
- limit the number of “don’ts”
- try speaking slowly with a low-pitched voice
- respond to feelings
 - follow their lead



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Communication Neglect

“Communication neglect occurs when caregivers avoid looking at, talking to, or touching” a resident in ways that may result in “withholding of warmth and nurturing”.

“Successful Communication with Alzheimer’s Disease Patients”

M.J. Santo Pietro, E.Ostuni



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- studies have shown that direct communication with staff takes up only **2%** of a resident's day
- staff and resident communication often revolves only around the “mantra of dementia care: *out of bed-wash-dress-feed-toilet-back to bed.*”

“What is Dementia care? Dementia is communication”

R. Ward, et al



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How do we avoid communication neglect?

- look for opportunities for communication (verbal and nonverbal)
- stop by the resident for a couple of minutes to “chat”
- mealtime is a good opportunity for conversation, even if it is one-sided
- during care, don’t focus your conversation only on the task at hand
- remember the importance of touch during care and apart from care
- always keep in mind, that you may be the only person who “touches” the resident that day.



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“Long term care isn’t rocket science -it’s harder...Long term care workers are the angels of this world”.

“Listen with the Ears of Your Heart”

D. Seman



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QUESTIONS



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