

9

Caring for Patients with Dementia

Teaching Plan

To use this lesson for self-study, the learner should read the material, do the activity, and take the test. For group study, the leader may give each learner a copy of the learning guide and follow this teaching plan to conduct the lesson.

Learning objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Know the definition and symptoms of dementia
- Know some good ways to respond to difficult behavior
- Know the importance of trying to understand what a patient with dementia is thinking and feeling
- Understand the difficulties faced by someone with dementia

Lesson activities

Give each learner a copy of the corresponding learning guide. Before beginning, assign one of the case studies to each of three different learners. Ask them to be ready to present the case to the group. Decide whether you are going to give the matching test or use the bingo game as an alternative, or do both if you have time.

Explain that the learners will be examining good ways to work with patients that have dementia, and encourage the learners to ask specific questions about patients they assist. Many times, other workers will have good ideas about how to help a specific patient, and they need opportunities to share this information with each other.

CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

Section 1: Definition

1. Ask a learner to read the definition and causes of dementia from the learning guide. Determine whether the learners have any questions about this information.
2. Briefly review the “Important things to remember about dementia” in the learning guide. Mention that it might seem time-consuming to try to figure out what a patient with dementia is thinking or feeling, but they have the right to expect this from their caregivers. In addition, spending the time to do this will often save time and difficulty later. Emphasize that there is not one right way to help, but that each individual person has special needs and special ways of relating that must be understood.

Section 2: Results and ways to manage

Discuss “The results of dementia” in the learning guide and lecture on the following ways to deal with symptoms:

1. **Memory loss:**
 - a. Teach a skill by repeating the procedure in exactly the same way over and over again
 - b. Provide opportunities for the patient to perform skills he or she remembers from before he or she developed his or her impairment (folding clothes, raking, sweeping, sanding wood, stuffing envelopes, piano playing)
2. **Language loss:**
 - a. It is up to the caregiver to understand and be understood by the patient
 - b. Ask direct, closed questions, not open-ended ones: “Would you like to play cards today?” not “What shall we do today?”
3. **Attention loss:**
 - a. Remember that patients hear what we say even if they don’t seem to be listening
 - b. Minimize distractions
4. **Judgment loss:**
 - a. Respect the individual’s right to make his or her own decisions as you gently guide him through each step of a decision

CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

5. Loss of senses or perceptions:

- a. Provide strong visual cues. For example, silverware on a white tablecloth might be difficult to see, so use a colored cloth.

6. Loss of muscle organization:

- a. Start an activity for them at the beginning and determine whether muscle memory will take over.
- b. Male patients may be unable to get in a car on the passenger side because of habit. Let them sit on the rear left side.

Section 3: Communication—use the guide

Review communication tips and ways to help.

Section 4: Case studies—use the guide

Ask three different learners to present one of the case studies in this lesson to the group. Allow for discussion.

Conclusion

Have participants take the test. Review the answers together. Award certificates to those who answer at least seven (70%) of the test questions correctly.

Test answers

1. f, 2. a, 3. e, 4. j, 5. h, 6. d, 7. g, 8. i, 9. b, 10. c

Caring for Patients With Dementia

Dementia is an *organic* mental disorder involving a general loss of intellectual abilities and changes in the personality. (*Organic* in this sense means the disorder is caused by physical changes in the brain.) Dementia is a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life.

Symptoms

Symptoms can vary greatly, but at least two of the core mental functions below must be significantly impaired to be considered dementia:

- Memory
- Communication and language
- Ability to focus and pay attention
- Reasoning and judgment
- Visual perception

Many different things cause dementia. The most common, in order of occurrence, are:

1. Alzheimer's disease
2. Strokes and other blood vessel diseases
3. Parkinson's and other nervous system diseases
4. Miscellaneous causes, such as alcoholism, malnutrition, head injuries, drug reactions, thyroid disease, brain tumors, and infections

Important things to remember about dementia

- Adult dementia sufferers deserve the respect and status they have earned. They often do not know their abilities have changed and do not understand why people treat them differently. They must be given as many opportunities as possible to make decisions and retain control over their lives.

CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

- With the right environment and support, a patient's ability to function can be strengthened and improved. If those supports are removed, the patient's function will decline.
- The deficiencies caused by dementia affect all areas of a person's life. Although the disability is invisible, it affects the patient's ability to do even the smallest activities.
- The way a person with dementia behaves is not just the result of impaired brain functions. Behavior is often caused by efforts to meet needs while compensating for lost abilities.
- We can help people with dementia by trying to understand what they feel and think.

Dementia is like looking at the world, and being seen by others, through a funhouse mirror.

The results of dementia

- **Memory loss:**
 - Affects recent memories the most
 - Makes it difficult to learn anything new or to follow instructions
- **Language loss (the meaning of words):**
 - Makes it difficult to recognize words and understand complex sentences
 - Makes it difficult to express ideas
- **Attention loss:**
 - Unable to start or stop a task
 - Easily distracted
- **Judgment loss:**
 - Cannot accurately assess circumstances
 - Unable to see consequences of actions
- **Loss of perception or senses:**
 - Unable to recognize things or people
 - Misinterpret what they see, hear, or feel
- **Loss of muscle organization:**
 - Unable to perform multiple-step tasks
 - Require prompts or cues for routine tasks

CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

Communication tips

- Be open, friendly, and gentle at all times.
- Always address the person by name to get his attention at the beginning of an interaction.
- Give your full attention to the conversation or task. This helps the patient stay focused.
- Briefly introduce yourself and offer some cues when you approach, stating your name and relationship and the purpose of your visit.
- Speak slowly, but do not speak down.
- Use gentle touching or hand holding, but get permission first.
- Avoid arguing and attempts to reason with a person who is upset. Acknowledge his feelings and calmly distract him with something calming, pleasant, and friendly.

Ways to help a patient perform a task

1. Explain each step in simple language, one thing at a time
2. Demonstrate each step, doing the task while he or she watches
3. Move the person through the steps of the task, placing arms and legs in the right positions
4. If distracted, begin again at the beginning
5. Remember to be patient and unhurried

Case studies: What would you do?

Mr. Blair

Mr. Blair is not normally incontinent. Recently, however, he has begun walking outside to relieve himself. Occasionally he wets himself. He has started to wander, and he often seems anxious and agitated.

What caregivers may assume: Mr. Blair has lost the ability to control his bladder and should be placed in adult incontinent briefs.

What is really happening: Mr. Blair cannot find the toilet. In his home, the white toilet blends in with the cream-colored tiles and walls, and his visual loss is causing him to be unable to see it. He spends much of

CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA

the day looking for a place to urinate, but when he can't find one he relieves himself outside, where there are more bright colors that are easy to see.

Try this: Place a brightly colored toilet seat or toilet cover on Mr. Blair's commode to help him locate it. When you see Mr. Blair wandering anxiously in the halls or acting agitated, ask whether you can help him find the bathroom and then guide him to it.

Miss Mead

Miss Mead was a nurse for 40 years. She refuses to eat in the dining room but insists on having a tray brought to her room. She doesn't eat the food you bring but places the dishes on her windowsills and cabinets "for the others." She is losing weight rapidly but refuses to eat.

What caregivers may assume: Miss Mead will have to be placed in a hospital and fed with a stomach tube because of her refusal to eat.

What is really happening: Miss Mead is concerned for the "others" that she sees in her room. She believes that her reflections in the mirrors and windows are actually people that need her to care for them. She will not eat until she feeds them first.

Try this: Ask questions to determine what Miss Mead is trying to do. Once you understand the situation, remove the mirrors from Miss Mead's room. Cover the windows with blinds or shades. You could provide two trays of food, one for Miss Mead and one for "the others."

TEST

Caring for Patients With Dementia

Name _____ Date _____ Score _____

Directions: Matching test. Find the answer that best matches each situation. You will not use all the answers.

1. In the case study about Mr. Blair, the caregivers helped him by providing what? _____
2. We can help people with dementia by doing what? _____
3. Many times, a person with dementia behaves in a difficult fashion because he or she is trying to _____.
4. When a person with dementia can't remember how to get into a car or starts to brush his hair with his toothbrush, which of the six results of dementia is causing the problem? _____
5. You should do this when starting a conversation with a patient with dementia. _____
6. When a person can't think of a word, or the words come out wrong or in the wrong order, they are experiencing which of the six results of dementia? _____
7. This is one way to help a person with dementia perform a task. _____
8. It is important that persons with dementia be allowed to do this as much as possible. _____
9. It is best to use these kinds of questions when dealing with patients with dementia. _____
10. Dementia is a condition that is characterized by _____.

Answer **Caring for Patients With Dementia (cont.)**

- a. Putting ourselves in their shoes, trying to understand what they feel and think
- b. Direct, closed questions such as “Would you like to wear this red dress today?” instead of open-ended questions like “What would you like to wear today?”
- c. Loss of intellectual abilities and personality changes
- d. Language loss
- e. Cope with or compensate for lost abilities
- f. Strong visual cues (contrasting colors on things the patient uses)
- g. Tell the person how to do each step in simple language, one thing at a time
- h. Address the person by name, and briefly introduce yourself and state the purpose of your visit
- i. Make decisions and retain control over their lives
- j. Loss of muscle organization