

Dementia Care Transitions: Dead Ends, Detours, Denial

Troy Christian Andersen, PhD,
MSW, MS, LCSW
Associate Professor–Lecturer
College of Social Work, University
of Utah



College of Social Work
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Audience participation poll

- **T or F** When it comes down to care, knowing the actual type of dementia is irrelevant.

Dementia, It's all the same, right?

- **Alzheimer's disease**
 - Short-term memory loss
 - Impairment of IADL/ADL
 - Language/word finding
 - Problems with planning & sequential tasks
- **Frontotemporal Lobar Degeneration (FTLD)**
 - Emotional & behavioral changes
 - Social disinhibition & decreased attention to hygiene
 - Executive function deficits
- **Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB)**
 - Fluctuations in alertness & attention
 - Increased lethargy, rigidity
 - Visual hallucinations
 - Parkinsonian motor symptoms
 - Sleep disturbance
- **Vascular Dementia**
 - Impaired judgment & planning
 - Caused by blockage & bleeds rather than accumulation of protein
 - Location of damage determines associated functional changes

Key Transition Points

- Diagnosis
 - Normal aging
 - “Don’t say Alzheimer’s disease to mom”
- Driving
 - I’ve been driving since I was 15
 - I’ve never had a ticket
- Home-based services
 - I don’t need help I’m fine
 - I don’t want strangers in my home
- Residential care admission
 - It’s too expensive
 - I don’t want to live with those OLD people
- Each change represents a loss
 - Function
 - Independence
- Where there is anger look for fear
 - What is the underlying emotion?

Audience Participation

- **T or F** Most dementia patients are conniving, manipulative and intentionally difficult.

Critical Considerations

- Confabulating
- Compensating
- Reverting to “historical truth”
- Remote v new memories
- Impaired insight v. denial
- Logic & reason rabbit holes
- Use maintaining independence as a motivator
- Viewing motives through a normal cognitive lens
- All behavior is communication & behavior makes sense
- Everyday is new
- Join in their world v. joining us in ours
- Resistance as a healthy defense

Audience Participation

- **T or F** It is mandatory to constantly reorient a dementia patient or their memory will get worse.

Critical Considerations cont'

- Start early
- Revisit often
- Start with an agreed upon goal
- Provide choices
- Maintain a practical focus
- Complexity = confusion
- Divert focus from primary caregiver
- “Rotating bad guy”
- Art of therapeutic fibbing
- Sometimes the kangaroos are real!

ADDRESSING BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

Anger & Aggression

- Physical discomfort?
- Fatigue?
- Overstimulation?
- Poor communication/approaches from assisting individuals
- Don't get upset
- Limit distractions
- Redirect
- Change pace
 - Alzheimer's Association (ALZ.ORG)

Anxiety & Agitation

- Relocating?
- Changes in environment (i.e. travel)?
- Changes in caregiver arrangements?
- Create a calm environment
- Avoid environmental triggers
- Simplify tasks/routines
- Exercise
- Listen to the frustration
- Reassure
- Check your agitation/energy level

- Alzheimer's Association (ALZ.ORG)

Hallucinations & Delusions

- Is it upsetting?
- Is there a reversible cause?
- Are there sensory changes (i.e. hearing loss)?
- Respond calmly
- Reassure
- Redirect
- Change the environment (i.e. change rooms)
- Check for sounds or lighting that may contribute
- Mirrors can be upsetting
 - Alzheimer's Association (ALZ.ORG)

Repetition

- Commonly occurring symptom of advanced AD
- Short-term memory loss causes inability to recall previous conversations
- Can express underlying anxiety
- Look for reasons behind repetition
- Focus on emotions not behavior
- Turn behavior into an activity
- Stay calm
- Provide the answer
- Redirect to another activity
 - Alzheimer's Association (ALZ.ORG)

Sleep Issues & Sundowning

- End of day exhaustion?
- Upset internal clock?
- Fatigued caregiver?
- Inability to separate dreams from reality
- Frequent awakenings?
- Early awakening?
- Wandering?
- Keep home well lit in evening
- Maintain schedule
- Avoid stimulants & large meals
- Plan more activities, avoid napping
- Safety proof the house to reduce fall risks
- Alzheimer's Association (ALZ.ORG)

Partners in Dementia Care

9 general areas addressed by PDC:

- Disease specific education
- Lifestyle suggestions
- Safety
- Legal/Financial
- Expanding the care support network
- Proactive use of respite
- Planning for the unexpected
- Planned living transitions
- Hospitalization & doctor visit planning

National & Regional Resources

- Alzheimer's Association
 - ALZ.ORG
 - Utahmemory.org
- Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration
 - Theaftd.org
- Lewy Body Dementia Association
 - Lbda.org
- American Parkinson Disease Association
 - Apdaparkinson.org
 - Utahapda.org
- Progressive Supranuclear Palsy
 - Curepsp.org
- Salt Lake County Aging Services
385-468-3200
- Davis Co Aging Services 801-525-5050
- Mountainland Aging Services
801-229-3800

Thank you!

Questions?

Troy.andersen@hsc.utah.edu