



PATIENT / FAMILY TEACHING SHEETS

DEMENTIA

What is Dementia?

- Dementia includes multiple cognitive deficits that occur gradually over time. The most common deficit is memory impairment that can affect the ability to interact with others or hold down a job. The most common disease causing dementia is Alzheimer's disease

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Dementia?

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulties with familiar activities
- Language problems. The patient may not be able to use simple words. The patient may use the wrong word to fill in what he/she doesn't know. This can make it hard to know what the patient is trying to say
- Problems with losing their sense of direction. The patient may go somewhere. Then not know how to get back home
- Problems with judgment. The patient may wear a robe to go shopping. The patient may wear a winter coat in the middle of summer
- Problems with numbers. The patient may not be able to do simple math
- The patient may place things in the wrong places. For example, the patient may put the iron in a drawer. The patient often will forget where he/she has put things
- Sudden mood swings without a known cause
- Personality changes may occur suddenly. The changes may also occur over a period of time. For example, someone who is usually kind becomes angry or hateful
- Loss of interest in loved hobbies. No interest in new activities

What to Report to the Hospice/Palliative Care Team

- Any signs of behaviors listed above
- Any signs of hurting self or others

What can be done for Dementia?

Family

- Treat patient with respect
- Set limits. Take control when possible. You may need to remind the patient of the day, place and time
- Remember the patient is an adult. Treat him/her that way. Do not treat them like a child, which could embarrass him/her
- Offer explanation before helping patient with care
- Try to understand the emotions and feelings of the patient. Keep in mind though that you cannot understand everything. You can only do your best
- Create a daily routine with small rituals. These can include prayers, washing hands or preparing food. Try not to do too little or too much.
- Allow the patient to do as much of their own care as possible. This will help maintain their self esteem
- Include former habits and memories. Provide the patient with things to hold that represent a part of his/her life. These can include pictures, clothing, anything of meaning to the patient
- Provide physical closeness. Try touching, gestures and eye contact. Show your own feelings
- Talk in a calm and reassuring manner. You may need to be more tolerant of unusual behavior by reducing your reaction to bizarre behaviors
- Always be aware of safety
- Resist the impulse to control the behavior. The behaviors may have meaning. The meaning may not make sense to you. Try to move to a new activity when the patient becomes stressed
- Caring for someone with dementia is very demanding
- Take care of yourself. The sooner you accept help, the longer you can help the patient

You can find other HPNA Patient Teaching Sheets on end-of-life care at <http://www.hpna.org/PatientEducation.asp>.