Covid-19: Tips for Reducing Emotional Distress in Patients with Dementia

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### Impacts of Covid-19 on Patients with Dementia

#### Triggers for Increased Emotional Distress

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<th>Trigger</th>
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<tr>
<td>Change in routines</td>
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<td>Change in room</td>
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<td>Change in staff/direct care providers</td>
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<td>Reduced activities, space, and socialization</td>
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<td>No in-person visits from family and friends</td>
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<td>Possible losses (deaths of family, other residents, etc.)</td>
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<td>Change in emotional atmosphere (e.g. staff moods and facial expressions)</td>
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<td>Staff wearing PPE (cannot see face/cues)</td>
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How Dementia Impacts Mood Regulation

- Memory
- Orientation
- Executive functioning
- Language processing (receptive and expressive)
- Visual-spatial processing
- Emotional regulation
Indicators of Emotional Distress in Patients with Dementia

- **Emotional indicators**: crying/tearfulness, apathy, increased irritability, increased attention/support seeking
- **Verbal indicators**: yelling, cursing, noises
- **Behavioral indicators**: physical aggression (striking out), pacing, restlessness, fidgeting, increased withdrawal, perseverative behaviors
- **Somatic indicators**: headaches, muscle tension, fast or irregular heartbeats (palpitations), shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea or diarrhea
- **Cognitive indicators**: increased disorientation, confusion, forgetfulness, concentration difficulties
- Changes in sleep and appetite
Non-Pharmacological Interventions to Reduce Psychological Distress in Patients with Dementia

What YOU Can Do to Support Your Patients
Identify the Trigger

• Try to figure out what is causing/contributing to the patient’s anxiety so you can try to address it

• Think carefully about what happened right before he seemed anxious

• Look for possible reasons and patterns

• Consider if there is an unmet need
Identify the Trigger

- Are they not able to understand what is being said or what is happening?
- Could they have too much or too little activity? Are they bored?
- Could they be upset because of a recent change in routine?
- Have they been around many people whom they don’t know?
- Are they frightened or confused by the PPE?
- Could they be responding to your emotions (i.e. Mirroring)?
Remove or Address the Trigger

• Turn off/limit Covid-19 News
• Avoid relocating patients if able
• Avoid conversing with colleagues about distressing information in front of patients
• Avoid yelling, arguing in patient/public settings
• Monitor non-verbals and facial expressions
• Introduce yourself and explain what you will be doing (especially important when wearing PPE)
• Keep to a new, simple routine
## Stay Calm and Compassionate

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<tr>
<th>Check your own reactions:</th>
<th>Be sensitive:</th>
<th>Listen:</th>
<th>Reassure:</th>
<th>Validate resident’s feelings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid raising your voice</td>
<td>• To resident’s fears</td>
<td>• Allow the patient to talk about his/her concerns</td>
<td>• Make positive, reassuring statements</td>
<td>• “I'm sorry that you are upset.”</td>
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<td>• Avoid arguing with the person</td>
<td>• Try to understand (empathy)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• “You are safe here.”</td>
<td>• “I know it's hard.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mirror calm emotions and facial expressions</td>
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<td>• “Everything is under control.”</td>
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Communicate Clearly and Simply

- Use simple sentences
- Give small chunks of information at a time
- Offer 2-3 choices max when discussing interventions
- Repeat as needed
Re-orient with Patience

- When anxious, a patient with dementia may be even more perseverative or persistent in their questioning.
- Answer the question – even 20 times a day.
- Use memory cues (calendars, white boards, etc.).
- Avoid saying: “Don’t you remember...”
Pleasant Events and Redirection

See Pleasant Activities Video in this Covid-19 series

Find positive outlets for the person’s anxious energy

- Music
- Technology
- Facetime with family
- Individual arts and crafts, games, etc.
Refer to the Psychologist

- Psychotherapy (talk therapy) is effective in patients with mild to moderate dementia (not severe dementia), e.g.
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy
  - Interpersonal therapy
  - Problem solving therapy
  - Supportive therapy
  - Life review/reminiscence
  - Relaxation and mindfulness interventions
  - Acceptance and commitment therapy
Grounding Techniques

- Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present.

- Grounding techniques can help calm a patient who is currently being triggered and to de-escalate a situation.
Grounding Techniques

Ask the patient to describe what he or she observes
  • What do you see out of your window

Help the resident decrease the intensity of their affect
  • *Emotional Dial*: have the patient imagine (visualize) turning down the volume on his or her emotions
  • “Clenching Fists:”
    • Have the patient clench her fists
    • Guide the patient to imagine the emotional energy moving into her fists
    • Then guide the client to open her hands and “release” the emotional energy
THANK YOU

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