

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

Change in routines

Change in room

Change in staff/direct care providers

Reduced activities, space, and socialization

No in-person visits from family and friends

Possible losses (deaths of family, other residents, etc.)

Change in emotional atmosphere (e.g. staff moods and facial expressions)

Staff wearing PPE (cannot see face/cues)

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



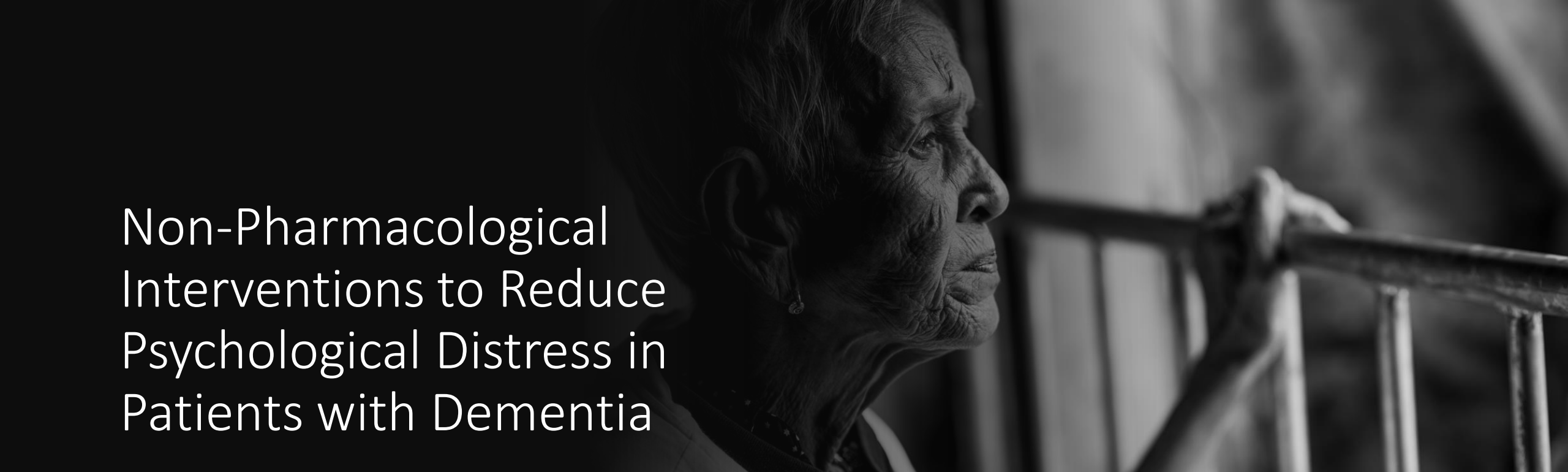
Somatic indicators: headaches, muscle tension, fast or irregular heartbeats (palpitations), shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea or diarrhea



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

Check your own reactions:

- Avoid raising your voice
- Avoid arguing with the person
- Mirror calm emotions and facial expressions

Be sensitive:

- To resident's fears
- Try to understand (empathy)

Listen:

- Allow the patient to talk about his/her concerns

Reassure:

- Make positive, reassuring statements
- "You are safe here."
- "Everything is under control."

Validate resident's feelings

- "I'm sorry that you are upset."
- "I know it's hard."



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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

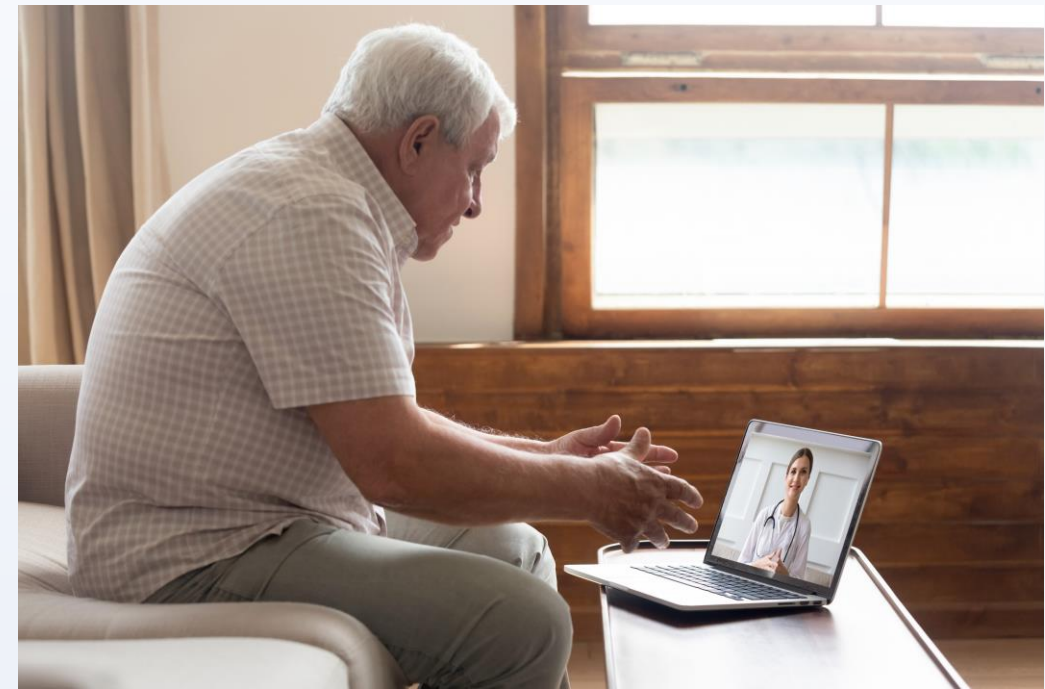
See Pleasant Activities Video in this Covid-19 series

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



A person is shown in a meditative pose, sitting cross-legged on a wooden deck. The person's silhouette is filled with a vibrant sunset scene, featuring a bright orange sun low on the horizon over a body of water, with a forest in the background. The person's right hand is resting on their knee in a mudra. The background of the entire image shows a real person in a similar pose on a wooden deck, with a dense forest and a bright sky. A large, semi-transparent white circle is positioned on the right side of the image, containing the title and list.

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

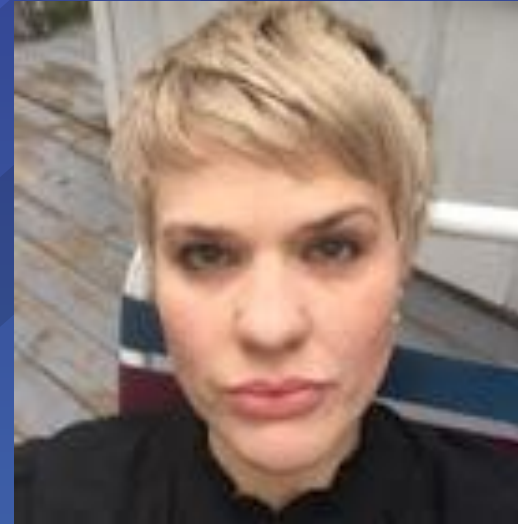
- *Emotional Dial*: have the patient imagine (visualize) turning down the volume on his or her emotions
- “Clenching Fists:”
 - Have the patient clench her fists
 - Guide the patient to imagine the emotional energy moving into her fists
 - Then guide the client to open her hands and “release” the emotional energy



THANK YOU



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