

THE REALITY OF DEMENTIA

Dementia is one of the top ten disease processes plaguing our world. Dementia is not a normal part of aging, and it affects approximately 5.7 million people in the U.S. alone. That number is projected to triple by the year 2050 to over sixteen million people in the U.S. Currently, every 65 seconds someone in the U.S. develops Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is thought to only impact older adults, but the reality of this form of dementia is that it impacts over 200,000 people younger than sixty-five in the U.S. alone. Worldwide, fifty million people have dementia and every 3 seconds someone new develops it.

Dementia Related Deaths:

- Alzheimer's disease is fatal with estimated death toll at 500,00 Americans each year.
- It is the only top ten cause of death in the U.S. with no known cure.
- It disproportionately impacts women and communities of color.
- It is the most expensive disease in the U.S.

Financial Impact of Dementia:

- Total annual out-of-pocket payments in U.S. for healthcare, LTC, and hospice for Alzheimer's and dementias are projected to reach \$1.1 trillion by 2050.
- Medicare and Medicaid only cover \$175 billion requiring at least 68% of out-of-pocket expenses.
- Medicaid payments are twenty-three times higher for those with Alzheimer's compared to those without and Medicare payments are three times greater.
- By 2050, Alzheimer's is expected to increase Medicare and Medicaid costs by over 330%.
- \$250 billion are spent annually on out-of-pocket expenses which are more than 179 times the amount spent on finding a cure, even though the research community believes that a cure is possible within the next 10 years if funding becomes available.
- For every dollar the federal government spends today on costs of care for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, it invests less than a penny in research to find a cure.

Dementia changes:

- **Misperceptions** occur when a person sees one thing as something else.
Example: Blue floor tiles might appear to be water
- **Misidentifications** occur when a person has problems identifying specific people/objects.
Example: Mistaking son for husband
- **Mistakes** can be caused by either misperceptions and/or misidentifications.
Example: visual system damage may not clearly see a TV remote (misperceived); might clearly see a TV remote but the brain incorrectly identifies it as a phone (misidentified)
- **Hallucinations** are seeing things that are not there: Simple hallucinations are like seeing flashing lights. Complex hallucinations are like seeing animals, people, strange situations.
Types of hallucinations:
 - Auditory – hearing things that are not there (voices/footsteps)
 - Olfactory – smelling things that are not there (smoke/perfume)
 - Tactile – physically feeling something not there (being kissed, insects crawling)
 - Gustatory – tasting things not there (metallic taste in mouth)
- **Delusions** – strongly held false beliefs (feelings of being watched or someone is acting against them)
- **Paranoia** – makes a person feel threatened.
- **Time-shifting** is when a person's experience is that they are living at an earlier time in their life (may become disoriented, confused about time/place)

Supporting People with Dementia:

- **Listen** to what they are saying, pay attention to what they are doing, and see things the way they are seeing them.
- **How would you feel if the roles were reversed?**
- **See people as people** – stop thinking about your list of "to dos."
- **Alter or adjust your approach and efforts.**
- **Mentor others**, measure the impact of your approach and communicate it to others.
- **Communicate** what worked, what did not, and what needs to change to make positive improvements.

Resources and References:

- Dementia CARES Online Dementia Training-
<https://educate.ahcancal.org/CARESprogram>
- Caring for a New Generation in Assisted Living -
<https://educate.ahcancal.org/products/caring-for-a-new-generation-in-assisted-living>
- Sexuality and the Resident with Dementia -
<https://educate.ahcancal.org/products/sexuality-and-the-resident-with-dementia>
- Alzheimer's Association (2024)
https://www.alz.org/alzheimer_s_dementia
- UsAgainstAlzheimer's (2024)
https://www.usagainstalzheimer.org/alzheimers-disease-get-facts?gad_source=1&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlzazlp835hgMVO39vBB3yCA-qEAAyASAAEgly7_D_BwE
- Alzheimer's Society (2024)
<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/how-dementia-changes-perception>