Communication and Dementia
Listening with your Heart

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Learning Objectives

• To understand the communication process

• To recognize the barriers to communication in normal aging and in adults with dementia

• To understand the importance of non-verbal communication
Learning Objectives

• To identify strategies for effective communication with people with dementia
• To review current programs that address communication and dementia
• To highlight the role of the SLP with dementia
SLP role

- Assess and manage swallowing disorders
- Assess and manage communication disorders
- Staff training
- Family counselling
- Advance care plan discussions
Communication

- Exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge between people
- A reciprocal process
- Dependent on the ability of those involved to share not only words, but concepts, emotions, and thoughts
- Verbal and Non-verbal
Communication is ...

• “Interpreting the messages and responding in an appropriate manner”
  – Caris-Verhallen

• “How we share our ideas, needs and feelings with one another”
  – D. Ripich

• “When an idea is passed correctly from one person to another”
  – J. Powell
Purpose of Communication

- Expression of wants and needs
- Exchange of information
- Maintenance of social etiquette
- Social closeness
4 areas of Language

• Understanding
• Talking (verbal expression)
• Reading
• Writing
Aging Changes that Affect Communication

Vision
Hearing
Touch & Pain
Smell
Taste
KEEP CALM
YOU'RE NOT THAT OLD
KeepCalmAndPosters.com
Dementia is an overall term for a set of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. Symptoms may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language, severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. A person with dementia may also experience changes in mood or behaviour.

Dementia is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse as more brain cells become damaged....

www.alzheimer.ca
Dementia and the Brain
Communication Losses
with Dementia

Early Stages

– Takes longer to process information
– Thoughts may wander from the conversation –
  difficulty staying on track
– Problems recalling names of people, places and
  things
– ‘Tip of the tongue’ feeling
– May repeat words and phrases
Communication Losses with Dementia

Mid Stage

– Forget more complex words; may invent words to ‘fill the gap’
– Increased generalizations
– Loss of sense of message – greater reliance on social phrases
– Difficulties in following verbal and written instructions
– Less initiation of conversation
Communication Losses
with Dementia

Late Stage

– Use of single words
– Limited initiation of conversations
– Non-verbal sounds
– Communication as a whole is largely non-verbal
Sensory Changes
Communication is ...

7% Verbal
93% Nonverbal
(tone of voice, posture, facial expression)

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.” Peter F. Drucker
Non-Verbal Communication

All aspects of communication other than words.
- includes, but is not limited to:

• Facial expression
• Body motion/position
• Touch
• Environmental factors
• Personal space
• Chronemics
• Paralanguage
• Silence
Non-Verbal Strategies

- smile
- posture
- gestures
- tone of voice
- rate of speech
- pauses
- equality
Strategies for Effective Communication
The journey into dementia has its disappointments to be endured as well as its triumphs to be cherished. In all of the ambiguities and confusion there may also be signs of hope, for this is a journey with intersecting signposts; reminders of the past and pointers to the future. There are always fresh opportunities for a new walk on a new day.

– Rosalie Hudson, 2006
Road Maps

Recognize challenges with initiating and maintaining conversation

– Set the stage
– Make sure they can see you
– Use their preferred name
– Supports
– Approach
Approach

• Teepa Snow: How to Approach (youtube.com)
• 1) front-side
• 2) equality
• 3) greet before you treat
• 4) permission
• 5) lock and rock
Reading the Road Signs

• The loss of verbal language skills leads to greater reliance on non-verbal language signs

• Strategies
  – Friendly, calm tone
  – Accommodate hearing loss
  – Watch facial expression, body position
Two-way Streets

• 50/50 may become 90/10

• Caregiver frequently directs the conversation

• Use strategies to open lanes of communication
  – Simple words/phrases
  – Slower pace
  – Longer pauses
  – Meaningful use of touch
  – Use of supportive materials (pictures, photos)
Developing Two-way Streets

• Studies have shown that direct communication with care providers comprises only 2% of a resident’s day

• Study of nursing interactions in long-term care
  – Staff always started the conversation
  – Residents were often sleeping when staff entered the room
  – The topic of conversation by nurses was always health or sickness – other staff sometimes talked about: weather, sleep, plans for the day
Dead Ends

Strategies for overcoming communication dead ends:

– Active listening
– Asking for clarification
– Repeating part of what you heard
– Re-approach later
– Change the topic or the form of the message
– Break up the message or simplify content
– Use supports (visuals)
– Change from open-ended question to multiple choice or yes/no question
– **Acknowledge them**
Stuck on the Bypass

• Messages in an endless loop

• **Strategies**
  – Don’t argue
  – Unmet needs?
  – Respond to the tone/feelings
  – Distract
Turn Signals

• Use of Yes/No answers

• Strategies
  – Rephrase/repeat
  – Open-ended ?
  – Watch for nonverbals
Familiar Routes

Knowing the person

– Joining their world

– Empathic listening

– Learning personal background
Rest Stops

• Losing train of thought

Strategies

– Minimize distractions
– Review the conversation
– Reassuring statements
– Allow time for silence
– Reassuring presence
Tune-ups
Ongoing monitoring of communication and care plan updates
  – Check your toolbox
  – Check the language level
  – Check the volume
  – Check the timing
  – Adjust the attitude
  – Check the environment
Suggestions for Comfortable Conversations

1) avoid talking across people
2) be aware- you may have heard this before
3) express one idea at a time
4) give time
5) look for meaning behind words
6) keep it simple
Making the most of your visit

• timing
• call ahead
• greeting
• let them lead
• minimize distractions
• pets
• go outside
• project
Enhance the Environment
Optimize the Visual Aspects

- Enhance lighting
- Maximize contrast
- Minimize glare
- Maximize cueing
Enhance Lighting

- General ambient lighting - 30 fc
- Bathroom - 50-60 fc
- Reading area - 75 fc
- Dining, kitchen, work area - 50 fc
- Agitation increases with poor lighting
- Improves communication and eating
Maximize Contrast
Reduce Glare
Cueing
Optimizing Hearing

• Minimize background noise
• Minimize reverberation
• Ensure hearing aids are working
• Keep music low and pleasant
• Keep conversations focused
Programs and Techniques
PIECES

- Physical
- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Capabilities
- Environment
- Social
Validation

- Center
- Observe
- Appropriate distance
- Verbal/ Nonverbal
- Empathy
- Positive note
Video

• “Gladys Wilson” (youtube.com)
Montessori
Memory Books/Wallet
Lifestory Profile
Music & Memory

Music unravels a memory, mends a thought, masks a pain, recaptures a moment and leaves a trail of healing in its gentle wake

Dr. Kaylan Subrahmanium
• “Henry” (Alive Inside) (youtube.com)
“There may be no single thing more important in our efforts to achieve meaningful work and fulfilling relationships than to learn to practice the art of communication”.

– Max DePree
Questions?
References

Hearing the Person with Dementia- Bernie McCarthy (2011).
Memory & Communication Aids- for People with Dementia- Michelle Bourgeois
You Say Goodbye- We Say Hello- Tom & Karen Brenner
ECAT Validation Techniques Vicki de Klerk-Rubin
Listen talk connect - Communicating with people living with dementia