



**JUNE 2018**

**You are **not** alone...**

# Education on Caring for the Patient with Dementia



**Veterans Health  
Administration**





**Join Maritza Buenaver, MD for the  
seventh part of the series  
Family Involvement in Dementia Care:  
“Medications and Treatments”**

**MEDICATIONS AND TREATMENTS** offers information about talking with providers about medications and their side effects, as well as other treatment options, to help you make informed decisions for your loved one with dementia.

Working as a partner with healthcare providers is important when deciding the best medications and treatment options for your loved one. Partnerships rely on communication, asking questions or for explanations, and bringing up concerns about medications or treatments.

Healthcare providers have the responsibility to help patients and their caregivers explore treatment options. They can help your loved one express their preferences. However, since everyone is different, it is important to remember that personal values and preferences for medical care cannot be accurately predicted by most providers, and sometimes not even by family. This is why it is essential to discuss medication and treatment options with your loved one while they are still able to express their wishes. These wishes can be documented through the advanced care planning process.

Advanced care planning is important. It is an **ongoing process** in which the entire team — patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers — reflects on the patient’s goals, values, and beliefs to guide the patient’s current and future medical care. Advanced care planning informs patients and empowers them to have a say about their treatment.

## Steps in the Advanced Care Planning Process

1. Have your loved one think through their values and preferences regarding medical treatment when they are no longer able to make those decisions.
2. Talk about their values and preferences with other family members as well as with healthcare providers.
3. Document these wishes in an advance healthcare directive (sometimes known as a living will).
  - ◇ An advance healthcare directive is a legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions due to their illness.
  - ◇ Share the advance healthcare directive with the healthcare team.
4. Review your loved one's wishes periodically and update them as needed.  
**Remember to always provide any changes to the healthcare team!**

### Tips from Family Caregivers

- ◆ Be realistic about what represents success as the dementia progresses. Success can be that your loved one is safe, comfortable, and as happy as possible.
- ◆ Know that not all healthcare providers are experts in dementia care.
- ◆ Never be afraid to ask for help or clarification. If you are unsure about something, **ask**.
- ◆ When deciding about medications or between treatments, ask the physician what they would do if they were treating their own loved one.
- ◆ Discuss options as early in the disease process as possible, while your loved one can still express their ideas and wishes.



## Questions to Consider When Thinking About Starting a New Medication or Treatment



- ◆ What other options are available?
- ◆ What happens if we do nothing?
- ◆ Does the benefit of the medication or treatment outweigh the risks/potential side effects?
- ◆ What interactions may this medication have with the other medications my loved one is taking?
- ◆ Will this medication worsen symptoms of the dementia?
- ◆ How soon might we expect to see benefits?
- ◆ How will we know if the medication or treatment is working?
- ◆ Is my loved one currently taking any medications that may no longer be needed?

## Common Misperceptions About Medications and Other Treatments

- ◆ *Misperception: Medicines and products purchased over the counter (without a prescription) are safe and free from side effects.* In fact, over-the-counter products often have active ingredients that may interact with other medications a person is taking. Always talk with a pharmacist first, before using any over-the-counter products.
- ◆ *Misperception: There is a medication available to help all symptoms of dementia.* In fact, medications may have limited effects on dementia-related behaviors as the disease progresses.
- ◆ *Misperception: All healthcare facilities share medical records.* In fact, they do not all share records. Keep a complete medication list with you at all times that lists all of the prescription AND over-the-counter medications your loved one is taking.
- ◆ *Misperception: Caregivers are not considered part of the healthcare team.* In fact, you are an **ESSENTIAL** part of the healthcare team! Speak up and make sure healthcare providers and facility staff know that you want to be made aware of any changes in your loved one's medications or treatments.

## Keep a Detailed Medication List with You

The medication list should include:

- ✓ Medication name
- ✓ Medication dose
- ✓ Who prescribed the medication
- ✓ Reason(s) for taking the medication
- ✓ Date of the last time the medication list was updated

## Resources for Medication and Other Treatment Information

There are many resources available to you for information about medications and other treatment options.

- ◆ Your local pharmacy or members of your healthcare team can help with questions and concerns about prescription and over-the-counter medications. Pharmacists are sometimes one of the most accessible healthcare professionals.
- ◆ Your local senior center or aging and disability center may offer services to have your questions answered or may be able to direct you to resources that can help.
- ◆ The internet can be a starting point when looking for answers. However, it is recommended that you verify information that you find on the internet with your healthcare team.

## When Deciding on Medication and Treatment Options...

- ◆ **Be proactive** with understanding each option that is available to your loved one — ask questions when you need more information.
- ◆ **Document all treatments and medications** that your loved one is taking, as well as any side effects they are experiencing.
- ◆ Remember that **YOU** are an important part of the healthcare team!

# Geriatrics and Ageism

## What is *Geriatrics*?

Geriatrics is the branch of medicine which specializes in problems and diseases of aging people. People who are 65 years and older have been called 'geriatric' since 1925, because that was retirement age. The geriatric population has 3 categories, 'young old', 'old-old', and 'oldest old' (85 years plus). Why is this important? As our bodies age, so do our organs and the way our bodies process information, food, medicines and illnesses. Geriatric care comprises a special population and requires special care in every aspect: medical, social and psychological.



*Dr. Buenaver is our geriatric psychiatrist.*

## What is *Ageism*?

Ageism is discrimination based on age and it can be especially prejudiced against the elderly. Age discrimination is holding negative stereotypes about people of different ages. Signs of ageism can include talking very loudly whenever approaching an elderly person, or thinking that all old people act a certain way, or assuming gray hair makes someone old. Remember, there are many 80 year olds who are not hard of hearing, are very active, and go dancing. There are also 50 year olds who have difficulty hearing, barely move because of pain and are not very active.





## Advance Care Planning

We are glad you have chosen VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System for your health care. We are very happy to introduce a new program to you called Advance Care Planning. This new, patient-centered program is a result of the hard work and dedication of staff at the VA who are determined to find a better way to assist in honoring your health care wishes.

Advance Care Planning is about planning for a time when you may not be able to make your own medical decisions which can suddenly happen at any time. This is a process that starts early on in our lives, then becomes more involved as chronic illnesses develop. Honoring your wishes involves having a conversation about your health care goals, wishes, and what quality of life care means to you. Advance Care Planning is an important step in taking charge of your own health care and making your wishes known. The program will help you think about your health care preferences and learn effective ways of communicating these preferences to your loved ones and to your health care team.

## Advance Care Planning Program

We encourage you to bring along at least one of your family members/caregivers to the program. This program is free to attend.

**Dates:** Held the 1st Wednesday of each month—please call Kay Anderson at 785-350-3111, Extension 52269 to make your appointment.

**Time:** 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Place:** Topeka VA Medical Center, Building 1, Hawley West—Room C114

# *A Tribute to My Team*

*The Kingdom of God is not far away  
You've taught me it's as close as the  
Things people do and say*

*For people such as you bring heaven nearer,  
helping me to see God's image clearer*

*This is the reason the verse is sent,  
And the meaning inside specifically meant  
for the team of 4-2B*

*Who by deed, word and smile,  
Helped me find the courage to walk  
That second mile*

*Thank you,  
Love you all  
Mack Hinson  
10/25/17*





The Caregiver's meeting is held the 3rd Thursday of each month at 2:30pm, Hawley East, Building 1 (Main hospital). Next meeting June 21st, 2018.

Do you have a story you would like to share? Are there questions you would like answers to from other caregivers? If so, approach Dr. Buenaver at the meeting. We meet informally at 2:15, before the meeting starts. Join us for coffee and snacks.

**Don't Forget: Hawley East, Bldg. 1. If you come through the main doors of Bldg. 1, turn right at the intersection by the elevators. Hawley Auditorium is at the end of the hall.**

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Presently we have a program for education on caring for the Veteran with dementia. It includes a monthly newsletter which can be mailed to your home, or if preferred emailed to you. You are welcome to bring the Veteran to these meetings.

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