



APRIL 2018

You are **not** alone...

Education on Caring for the Patient with Dementia



**Join Maritza Buenaver, MD for the
fifth part of the series
Family Involvement in Dementia Care:
“Understanding Behaviors”**

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIORS offers information about challenging behaviors that go along with dementia and ideas about what messages those behaviors may be sending.

Remember, there are a wide range of behaviors in dementia, and they are often connected to changes and losses of abilities over time.

Challenging behaviors can trigger tension between family caregivers and providers related to the care for the person with dementia.

A **shared understanding of the changes in abilities** can help family and providers work together as partners to better understand what the behaviors may be communicating.

Behavioral symptoms or issues vary by the stage of dementia. The **middle stage** is where behaviors are more common.

Behaviors may include:

- ◆ Agitation
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Pacing
- ◆ Resistance to care assistance

Changes in behaviors relate to several factors, including:

- ◆ Gradual loss of abilities due to dementia
- ◆ Factors in the environment
 - ◇ Unmet needs (physical, social, psychological)
 - ◇ Physical illness (acute, chronic, psychiatric)

Behavior is communication! Think about what the behavior might be telling us.

Look for unmet needs:

- ◆ Are they wandering because they are bored?
- ◆ Are they grabbing or hitting because they are in pain?
- ◆ Are they agitated because they are overstimulated?
- ◆ Are they withdrawn because they are understimulated?
- ◆ Are they calling out because they are lonely?
- ◆ Are they pushing because they want privacy?

Influences in the environment may be key.

How family caregivers and providers respond to behaviors has a powerful influence on outcomes!

Tips from Family Caregivers



- ◆ Involve family members **immediately** when a provider is experiencing a behavior concern.
- ◆ Problem solve with the team about concerns. You have vital information and suggestions which may help!
- ◆ “Embarrassing” behaviors and personality changes that come with dementia can be difficult to cope with. Take time for yourself and your emotions during these changes.

Common contributing factors to behaviors:

- ◆ Unmet physical needs
- ◆ Unmet psychological needs
- ◆ Overlapping illnesses
- ◆ Physical environment
- ◆ Social environment

Unmet physical needs include:

- ◆ Pain
- ◆ Hunger or thirst
- ◆ Tired
- ◆ Sensory impairment
- ◆ Illness
- ◆ Constipation or incontinence
- ◆ Medication side effects

Unmet psychological needs include:

- ◆ Loneliness
- ◆ Boredom
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Lack of privacy
- ◆ Lack of socialization

Overlapping illnesses include:

- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Delirium

Factors in the physical environment include:

- ◆ Background noise
- ◆ Pictures or reflections being misunderstood
- ◆ Lack of appropriate signage to reduce feeling lost
- ◆ Lack of natural walking paths for physical exercise



Factors in the social environment include:

- ◆ Too many people
- ◆ Too much noise
- ◆ Too little to do
- ◆ Communication is unclear
 - ◇ Too many words?
 - ◇ Too hurried?
 - ◇ Too complex for the person with dementia to understand?
 - ◇ Unrealistic expectations of the person with dementia?
- ◆ Caregiving approach doesn't match the person's current abilities
 - ◇ **Focus on the person, their preferences, and their abilities** — not the task at hand
 - ◇ Respect the person's privacy and personal space
 - ◇ Tell the person what is being done and why throughout the care process
 - ◇ Tailor care to the person's long-standing habits, patterns, and personality

Take the time to assess the person and the situation!

Proactively respond to your loved one's needs to help reduce challenging behaviors.

Help identify if the behavior is related to:

- ◆ Unmet need
- ◆ Longstanding habit or preference
- ◆ New health problem
- ◆ Loss of abilities

Use this information to direct your response and next steps. Consider:

- ◆ How can we best meet the needs of the person with dementia?
- ◆ How can care approaches or routines be changed?
- ◆ Is it time to make a new plan?

Please see next month's issue, "Responding to Behaviors," for ideas!



The Caregiver's meeting is held the 3rd Thursday of each month at 2:30pm, Hawley East, Building 1 (Main hospital). Next meeting April 19th, 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: Monthly meetings are held 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.

You are not alone.



Dwight D. Eisenhower VAMC & Colmery-O'Neil VAMC

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