



ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's Disease is named after Dr. Alois Alzheimer, a German physician who studied psychiatry and neuropathology. In 1906, Dr. Alzheimer noticed changes in the brain tissue of a 55 year old woman who had died of an unusual mental illness. Her symptoms included memory loss, language problems, and unpredictable behavior. After she died, he examined her brain and found abnormal clumps (now called amyloid plaques) and tangled bundles of fibers (now called neurofibrillary or tangles).

Alzheimer's Disease is the most common cause of dementia among older adults. Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—and behavioral abilities to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities. Dementia ranges in severity from the mildest stage, when it is just beginning to affect a person's functioning, to the most severe stage, when the person must depend completely on others for basic activities of daily living.

When patients with Alzheimer's Disease are eligible for hospice they are in the most severe/advanced stages of the disease process. These patients may spend most of their time in bed and say only a few words, if any at all. They are much more susceptible to infections/pneumonia. You may find that swallowing becomes very difficult for the patient. They become totally dependent on their caregiver for basic needs and require 24 hour care seven days a week.

It is important to remember that hospice care is a unit of care that includes the family/caregiver, who may have unmet needs. If while volunteering with these patients and families you note caregiver needs, make sure you notify your Volunteer Manager/Coordinator with this information.

What you will learn:

- Origin of the name Alzheimer's Disease
- Warning signs of Alzheimer's Disease
- The Volunteer's role in working with a patient/caregiver with Alzheimer's Disease
- Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

Risk Factors of Alzheimer's:

- Family history of Alzheimer's
- Over 65
- History of serious head injury

The Tribute is a monthly newsletter published for member agencies in honor of our Hospice volunteers!

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Remembering the Caregiver

Alzheimer's disease is irreversible and a progressive brain disorder that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills, as well as the capacity to carry out the simplest tasks. The rate of progression for Alzheimer's disease varies widely. On average, people with Alzheimer's disease live eight to 10 years after diagnosis, but some survive 20 years or more.

When patients with Alzheimer's Disease reach the Advanced stage of Alzheimer's, caregivers may be exhausted and then have to deal with end of life issues. At the same time, the hospice patient requires more care. The hospice Interdisciplinary Team which includes volunteers can help both the patient and the caregiver. Volunteers can help ensure dignity and comfort to these patients caregivers. When the patient has lost their cognitive and memory abilities they still are capable of having feelings of being scared, lonely and sad. We can help provide comfort and dignity by implementing measures that promote peace, a sense of feeling loved and security. The measures we implement should be individualized to help the patient, which in turn brings satisfaction and comfort to the caregiver.

Respite care provided by the volunteer can give the caregiver the freedom to take a break from caregiving for a short period of time. This gesture of kindness allows the caregiver some time for themselves. They may choose to get out of the house and change their environment for a little while. This brief respite can be so meaningful and helpful to the caregiver.

Caregivers often have anticipatory grief- which is the normal mourning that occurs when a patient or family is expecting a death. Emotional support and listening are two of the most important interventions to help the caregiver. Perhaps you may find the caregiver needs so much support you are unable to meet the needs of the patient. If this is the case, it is important to let your Volunteer Manager/Coordinator know. In some situations it may be necessary to have an additional volunteer, or more support from the IDG to help meet the needs of the caregiver and the patient.

(Note: The unit of care includes family and/or caregiver)

"We're really a composite of our life experiences-memory layered upon memory & Alzheimer's steals that memory away." –Meryl Comer



Four Quick Alzheimer's Facts

1. Due to memory problems associated with Alzheimer's, people with Alzheimer's will have problems with social skills (conversation, memory)
2. Alzheimer's disease damages the part of the brain that controls orientation, so people get lost.
3. The emotional center of a person with Alzheimer's gets damaged.
4. The part of the brain that regulates appetite also gets damaged.



The Volunteer's Role

- Playing his or her favorite music
- Reading portions of books that have
- Being present & focused
- Emotional support to patient & caregiver
- Rubbing lotion with a favorite scent into the skin
- Brushing the person's hair
- Provide respite for caregiver

Percent of Patients in settings with Alzheimer's/dementia

- ▶ Adult Day Services Center: 29.9% (2014)
- ▶ Residential Care Community: 39.6% (2014)
- ▶ Home Health: 31.4% (2013)
- ▶ Hospice: 44.7% (2013)
- ▶ Nursing Home: 50.4% (2014)

Ten Early Warnings of Alzheimer's Disease

- Memory Loss That Disrupts Daily
- Challenges in Planning or Solving Problems
- Difficulty Completing Familiar Tasks
- Confusion With Time or Place
- Trouble Understanding Visual Images
- New Problems With Words in Speaking or Writing
- Misplacing Things & Inability to Retrace Steps
- Decreased or Poor Judgment
- Withdrawal From Work or Social Activities
- Changes in Mood and Personality

No one should face Alzheimer's alone!



Three Major Stages of Alzheimer's

Mild Alzheimer's disease (early-stage)

- Problems coming up with the right word or name
- Forgetting material that one has just read
- Losing or misplacing a valuable object
- Increasing trouble with planning or organizing

Moderate Alzheimer's disease (middle-stage)

- Forgetfulness of events or about one's own personal history
- Feeling moody or withdrawn
- Confusion about where they are or what day it is
- Trouble controlling bladder and bowels in some individuals
- Changes in sleep patterns, such as sleeping during the day and becoming restless at night
- An increased risk of wandering and becoming lost

Severe Alzheimer's disease (late-stage)

- Require full-time, around-the-clock assistance with daily personal care
- Lose awareness of recent experiences as well as of their surroundings
- Require high levels of assistance with daily activities and personal care
- Experience changes in physical abilities, including the ability to walk, sit and, eventually, swallow
- Have increasing difficulty communicating
- Become vulnerable to infections, especially pneumonia

--Alzheimer's Association

Credits: http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_stages_of_alzheimers.asp ; <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alzheimers.htm> ; <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/in-depth/alzheimers-stages/ART-20048448?pg=2> ; http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_stages_of_alzheimers.asp ; <http://alz.org/10-signs-symptoms-alzheimers-dementia.asp>