

# Showcase for Seniors

FALL & WINTER 2016

## Challenging Behaviours Related to Alzheimer's and Dementia

By **Corey MacKenzie, RN**

Behaviours associated with dementia can be challenging but it's very important to understand that the behaviour is often the result of an unmet need. Look for the reason behind the behaviour. To do this, ask yourself WHY this behaviour is happening? Pinpointing the root cause makes it easier to determine a solution. The following list can help:

- Look for signs of physical discomfort: Are they in pain? Are they hungry or thirsty? Do they need to use the toilet? Is their body temperature comfortable? Are medications having negative effects?
- Ask them questions if they are able to respond: "Do you need to use a toilet?" "Are you worried about something?" "Are you tired?" etc.
- Are they concerned or anxious? Are they worried about something? Perhaps they are feeling anxious about something perceived to be real? Are they scared? Are they frustrated?
- Look at the environment: Did someone or something upset them? Is the environment too noisy or too quiet? Is it cluttered or confusing for them?
- Look for triggers: Did they see or hear something that triggered the behaviour? Could it be a certain time of day? Perhaps a certain person or phrase could have triggered the reaction/behaviour. Knowing the behaviour's root cause allows you to help. Some needs or behaviours may be easy to understand; others may require a more creative approach. For really challenging situations, you may need professional support.

### Sundowning

You may notice that the person with dementia displays a pattern of behaviours that occurs regularly in the late afternoon or early evening. This behaviour can cause a great deal of caregiver stress and exhaustion. Some of the behaviours you may witness can include:

- Confusion and/or agitation
- Restlessness and/or anxiety
- Exit-seeking and/or impulsiveness
- Forgetting how to complete tasks that they did not have trouble with

earlier in the day  
This behaviour pattern can be caused by:

- Changes in natural light that create shadows that agitate your loved one (hallucinations, delusions)
- Your loved one is more tired at the end of the day
- There is often less activity at the end of the day, which can increase restlessness

Tips for helping the person with dementia:

- Keep a journal to see what causes the behaviour
- Give your loved one time to rest throughout the day
- Schedule appointments for early in the day
- Increase lighting during this time
- Maintain routines
- Distract your loved one with activities (setting the table)
- Reduce the stimulation in the environment (reduce noise, visual stimuli)

### Coping with Behaviours

This experience is not the same for every caregiver, so it's important to try various ways of coping. The following may help in difficult situations.

- Validate their feelings: Showing concerns for someone's feelings often puts them more at ease. Showing you care about them and how they feel, regardless of whether their feelings are justified or fitting the situation, helps them feel heard and loved.
- Be creative: Be creative when caring for someone with dementia. You may need to be flexible and change a routine to make it work for your

situation. You may also need to change the way you do things or how you say things. Ideally you want to do whatever works; use your imagination!

- Therapeutic Reasoning: Therapeutic Reasoning is a technique many caregivers use with someone who has dementia. It involves tuning your message to the world of their perception. For example; if your loved one once lived on a farm and is anxious to get "home" to milk cows, explaining that they no longer live on the farm might be challenging. If so use Therapeutic Reasoning by saying, "Good news, the cows have already been milked today!"
- Keep a consistent and calm environment: Daily, consistent routines make for a more comfortable, supportive environment. So too does a quiet, calm atmosphere. Confusing sounds - a loud radio and TV turned on at the same time while trying to have a conversation - may create an environment that feels hostile. Reduced stimulation will likely contribute to a more peaceful and productive environment.
- Let them do as much as they can: Use it or lose it: the adage often applies to daily activities for individuals with dementia. Ideally, they should be doing as much as they can for themselves, for as long as possible. Encouraging them to remain involved can be a big help - for both of you.
- Be patient: It's not

always easy to maintain your patience. Try taking three deep breaths when you notice yourself slipping. Keep in mind that your loved one is likely not testing your patience on purpose; it's the disease at work, not the person.

- Take breaks: All caregivers need time to relax and "recharge their batteries." For some, the need may arise a few times a day; for others it may be a few hours a week or a few weeks in a year. Turning to family and friends for help or respite may be a great start. Other options may include community-based supports such as home care companies.
- Keep a sense of humour: Nothing about dementia is funny. That said, laughing can be a wonderful medicine for everyone. Do your best to cultivate a loving sense of humour every day and encourage the person with dementia to share in the moment. Having the person in a good mood will contribute to the quality of everyone's day.
- Don't be shy about asking for help: This cannot be stressed enough. Asking for help is a proactive way to remain healthy and able to support the person with dementia. Looking for ways to share some of the responsibility will help you provide better care.

Be sure to visit the We Care booth at the Seniors Expo on September 29 at the Best Western Glengarry in Truro.

**Corey MacKenzie, RN is Sr. Manager, Clinical Practices and Standards. We Care Health Services**

## Colchester Legion Stadium 14 Lorne St., Truro

### SCHEDULE:

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(doors open at 4:30 p.m. games start at 6:15 p.m. and Sat. afternoon bingo with doors open at 11:00 a.m. and games starting at 12:45 p.m.)  
It is advisable to check our website or call ahead of any event in case there are any changes or updates.

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72 60

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