

## **ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: CARING FOR A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

The purpose of this information sheet is to identify common behaviors associated with dementia. In addition, warning signs of caregiver stress and strategies for prevention of caregiver stress and burnout are offered.

#### **What are some common problem behaviors seen with dementia?**

Remember that the difficult behavior exhibited by the individual with dementia is not intentional. This behavior is the result of the disease process. The individual cannot control their behavior.

<b>Repetitive Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repeating words or questions over and over again.</li><li>• Repetitive actions, i.e. pacing and wandering</li></ul>
<b>Aggressive Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verbal (yelling and/or swearing)</li><li>• Physical (hitting or pushing)</li><li>• May occur for no apparent reason or may be associated with frustration or agitation</li></ul>
<b>Paranoid Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suspicion of family members or others (i.e. accusing them of theft or infidelity).</li><li>• Misinterpretation of the actions of others.</li></ul>
<b>Denial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resistance to accepting assistance with hygiene or other activities.</li><li>• Denial of the presence of symptoms of dementia</li></ul>

#### **What is caregiver stress?**

Caring for someone with dementia can be a challenging and intensely stressful responsibility. As a caregiver, you may start to feel angry and frustrated at yourself and your loved one. Feelings of guilt may be associated with the anger and frustration. You may believe that no one can understand the difficulties of your situation. You may also find it difficult to share your feelings or concerns with others. Care giving can be physically and emotionally draining. This cycle of anger, frustration and guilt is called caregiver stress. Over a period of time, caregiver stress can lead to caregiver burnout or an inability to effectively provide care or function in other necessary roles.

Eighty percent of caregivers of people with dementia suffer from caregiver stress. Many caregivers feel isolated and struggle through difficult times feeling that they cannot ask for help. Unfortunately, stress may be harmful to both the caregiver and the person with dementia.

## What are the warning signs of caregiver stress?

The presence of one or more of the following may be a sign of caregiver stress.

- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety/Irritability
- Exhaustion
- Inability to concentrate
- Depression
- Thoughts of harm to self or others

## What are the available services to help reduce caregiver stress?

### Support Groups

There are more than 1000 caregiver support groups throughout the United States. Caregiver support groups are groups where members can discuss aspects of caregiving and where members can learn and receive support, comfort, and reassurance from other members. These groups may be sponsored by various organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association, nursing homes, hospitals, day care centers, senior centers, area agencies on aging, and churches.

### Adult Day Care Centers

These programs provide social activities, meals, health care, and/or transportation in a supervised, structured setting for those with dementia.

### Respite Care Services

Respite care services are designed to give caregivers a break from the responsibilities of caregiving. Caregivers may need to take time away to conduct business or to be away from the caregiving experience. This may be for several hours, days, or weeks. There are also facilities available where individuals can be placed for short-term care.

### Educational Programs

Classes are available that offer suggestions and techniques on how to cope with the behaviors and personality changes that accompany dementia.

## What can I do to prevent caregiver stress?

1. **Ask for help and seek assistance:** Obtain the support of family and friends. Caring for an individual with dementia is too much responsibility for one person. Make use of community resources as described above. Attend a support group or get individual counseling.
2. **Take care of your own health.** Attend to your own needs and medical conditions. See your physician regularly. Take care of your own health so you will have the ability to care for others.
3. **Manage your stress level:** Relax and set aside some time for you to enjoy. Participate in exercise and pleasurable activities. Consult a physician if necessary for additional advice.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and click on Patient & Visitors, then Patient Education Rev. 7/04