

Nurse to Nurse

DEMENTIA CARE

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Preface

After my over 25 years of experience in the care of those with dementia and their families, it is apparent that an easy reference book is needed for those who provide direct care. The need for informed care is significant as those affected can live as long as 20 years until death. Many of these years are spent in a very debilitated state. As the science moves forward in an attempt to understand the underlying pathologic mechanism of dementing disorders, day-to-day care must be provided. Persons with dementia will be encountered by nurses across health care settings.

My philosophy is that even those who are severely debilitated deserve informed and respectful care until the end of their lives. That care includes special skills not only from medical/surgical perspectives but also neurological and psychiatric expertise. An underlying tenet is that effective care is “person centered.” It is to understand the person’s life before the illness; their interests and prior experiences will allow one to provide the most effective care.

This quick reference guide is meant to be of practical use by front line workers to solve day-to-day care problems. Each chapter begins with key points and further detailed discussions of each.

The book begins with an overview of the clinical characteristics of the many diseases causing dementia, how they can be recognized, and care tailored to them. An especially important chapter of this book informs caregivers on how to understand behavior problems and how to devise care that minimizes or prevents them.

Another valuable component of this book is the series of Family Guidelines. In my experience, both professional and family caregivers are often overloaded by complicated care directions. The Guidelines in this book are meant to be reprinted and made available as appropriate to clinical and family caregivers to focus on one area of care at a time. They can be used as an educational tool for staff and also given to families as they continue day-to-day care after discharge from a health care facility.

In the past, the determination of a case of dementia led to the search for a medication that could stop it or slow the progress of the disease. Currently, diagnostic procedures have been formulated and are quite accurate during life. Unfortunately, the medications to treat the underlying dementia have not proven successful in either significantly slowing the progression of the illness or stopping it. Scientists are now focused on ways to prevent the disease from starting or methods to delay the onset. To date those efforts have not been fruitful.

So, the day-to-day care of the millions of persons affected by dementia continues and is carried out by nurses, aides, companions and family members. This is difficult and challenging work. While we await a cure or prevention, the goal of care is to provide positive moments for patients, activity that is stimulating and meticulous nursing care all given with knowledge and respect for the life the person lived prior to becoming ill.

It is my hope that this book will provide clear direction to caregivers and improve the lives of the millions of persons affected by dementia.

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