



11-18-2015

## Communication & Interventions for People with Alzheimer's Dementia

Ann Eckhardt  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Amy Yeates  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Wendy Kooken  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Noël Kerr  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/utermohlen>



Part of the [Nursing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Eckhardt, Ann; Yeates, Amy; Kooken, Wendy; and Kerr, Noël, "Communication & Interventions for People with Alzheimer's Dementia" (2015). *Pursuing the Ephemeral, Painting the Enduring: Alzheimer's and the Artwork of William Utermohlen*. 4.  
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/utermohlen/4>

This Book is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

# Communication & Interventions for People with Alzheimer's Dementia

Dr. Ann Eckhardt  
Dr. Amy Yeates  
Dr. Wendy Kooken  
Dr. Noël Kerr

# Alzheimer's prevalence

5.3 million Americans has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease

$\frac{2}{3}$  of people with Alzheimer's are women

6th leading cause of death in the US

By 2025, over 7 million people are expected to be living with Alzheimer's

An estimated \$226 billion will be spent to care for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias in 2015



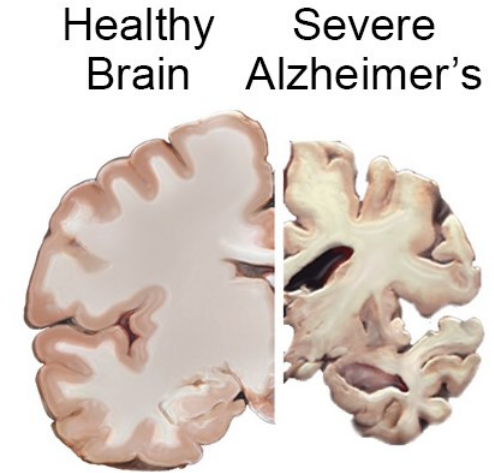
# What is Alzheimer's Dementia?

Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia

Slow onset and progressive worsening of the disease

Amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles are key features

The most common symptom is memory loss that becomes debilitating



# Communication and Alzheimer's

Communication ability gradually diminishes in people with AD

AD affects each person's communication ability differently

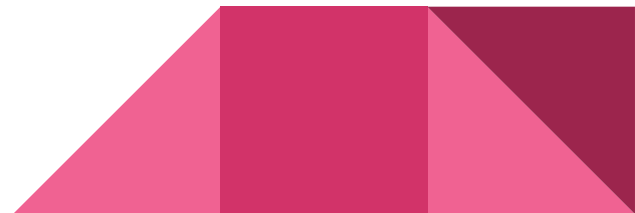
Communication changes may include:

- Repeating words

- Easily losing the train of thought

- Reverting back to native language

- Speaking illogically



# Communication tips

Be patient

Offer comfort

Avoid criticizing or correcting

Avoid arguing

Limit distractions



# Communication strategies

Introduce yourself

Keep it simple

Speak slowly and patiently

Turn questions into answers

Be positive, not negative



# Reminiscing: Focus on Yesteryear

“So long as the memory of certain beloved friends lives in my heart, I shall say life is good.” --Helen Keller







# Behavioral Interventions

# Behavioral Interventions

## Routine, Routine, Routine

- place keys, wallets, phones, etc. in the same location everyday
- schedule appointment on the same day of the week at the same time if possible
- use a white board or large “year at a glance” calendar for appointments and daily activities



# Behavioral Interventions

## Cognitive Therapy Approaches

- arithmetic problems, recall of images, puzzles
  
- practice of everyday activities such as shopping, cooking, and cleaning



# Behavioral Interventions

## Cognitive Therapy Approaches

- memory cueing
- reality orientation training
- repeatedly giving people with dementia basic information such as their name, the date, time or season
- accomplished during conversations or by placing orientation aids around the living area



# Behavioral Interventions

## Self care training

- breaking each skill into component parts
- providing prompts to enable the individual to complete each step
- utilization of pictorial representations in bathrooms/bedrooms



# Behavioral Interventions

Safe activities that may mimic what the individual enjoyed in the past or the loved one's career

- caring for a garden
- setting aside a safe “workroom” where the individual can tinker
- socialization is critical





# Complementary and Alternative Therapies

# Thinking Outside the Box: Engaging Patients with Alzheimer's Disease and Their Caregivers







# Protecting

## Purple Angel Wristband Project



<http://www.alzheimers.net/2013-06-12/purple-angel-wristband-project/>

# Engagement

<http://www.multisensoryenvironments.com/?gclid=CPC02a6l98gCFY0AaQodhFQENw>





# Engagement through Art

Memories and the Making

<https://youtu.be/AhVLOG20Lpg>



# Engagement through Music



# Music

Music and Memory





# Empathy



# Empathy versus Sympathy

Complex, multidimensional phenomenon;  
a human trait, a professional state, a  
communication process, caring, a special  
relationship

Ability 'to sense another's private world as  
if it were your own, but without ever losing  
the "as if" quality'

Awareness and insight into feelings,  
emotions, behavior of another person and  
their meaning and significance

Feelings of pity and sorrow for  
someone else's misfortune

An understanding (common feeling)  
between people

# Types of Empathy

Cognitive: knowing how the other person feels and what they might be thinking

Emotional: Feeling physically along with another person, as though their emotions were contagious; makes someone well-attuned to another person's inner emotional world

Compassionate: (Empathic concern): Not only understanding a person's predicament & feeling with them, but being spontaneously moved to help, if needed



# What Makes Empathy for People with Alzheimer's Difficult?

Core values of self-sufficiency, independence, rationality threatened

In social interactions “personhood” is diminished by ignoring the person with Alzheimer's, because their presence is discomfoting or awkward or because it is assumed they cannot speak for themselves

Persons with Alzheimer's:

have come to represent a kind of ‘death in life’, reminding us of the certainty & uncontrollability of our own personal deaths

are often seen as a “category”; they are ‘Alzheimer-ed’, subtly enabling those around them to avoid an anxiety producing encounter with their “otherness”

# Person-centered Care for Those with Alzheimer's

Challenge is to see each individual as a complete person with strengths and abilities; a person capable of well-being

Care-partner insights to “ill-being” as form of communication of unmet needs;

Frustration

Being overwhelmed or withdrawn

Behavioral expressions of anxiety or anger

Aim: To deeply know each person and support his or her success and well-being



# Empathy for Caregivers

## Types of Change / Loss

Partnership / role within the marriage

Intimacy & sexuality

Coping with:

Relocation of spouse or S.O.

Death of spouse, or S.O.



# Empathy for Caregivers

“Alzheimer’s causes a profound loss - that of the marital partner.... While spouses may still feel their old bond in the disease’s earlier stages, once it progresses, that connection is lost too.... It’s not sex as much as special friendships, such as being held at night, that the well spouses miss most”

The issue of caring for a spouse is never in doubt; the issue of caring for one’s self is...



## “An Open Letter to My Spouse” (Fitzgerald, 1999)


A document that addresses issue of “permission” to seek relationships outside of “but significantly compromised mentally or physically,”

Designed to be reviewed & signed jointly; Acknowledges love & commitment partners have for each other

Allows for open dialogue between spouses

*“please find someone you like who will be available to provide the emotional, intellectual & physical support & companionship that I then cannot provide you”*

Could, with clergy involvement, open possibility of new forms of pastoral counseling



# References

- Address, R. F. (2011). Till death us do part? A look at marriage rituals when a partner has Alzheimer's disease. *Journal of the American Society on Aging, 35* (3), 52-56.
- Hinton et al. (2011). Panel: Unus Mundus - Transcendent truth or comforting fiction? Overwhelm and the search for meaning in a fragmented world. *Journal of Analytical Psychology, 56*, 375–396.
- Ortigara, A. & McLean, R. S. (2013). Seeing the person first: Living with moderate-stage dementia. *Journal of the American Society on Aging, 37* (3), 66-69.