Caring for loved ones with dementia
OSU ElderCare Connections

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Objectives

1. What to look for when symptoms appear
2. Considerations for caregiving
3. Planning ahead
Regions of brain and their function

Parietal Lobe
- Integrates sensory info: temp/taste/touch/movement (perception, manipulating objects)

Occipital Lobe
- Vision: links eye images with images in memory

Cerebellum
- Balance, coordination
- Cognitive-emotional processes, empathy, emotional intelligence

Frontal Lobe
- Conscious thought, behavior, emotion, personality, organizing, problem-solving, Broca’s (expression)

Temporal Lobe
- Smell, sound. Processing complex stimuli like faces/scenes, forming/retrieving memory, Wernicke’s (comprehension)

Insula

R: abstract reasoning
L: language
## Spectrum of diagnostic stages

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<th>Normal aging changes</th>
<th>Mild cognitive impairment</th>
<th>Early dementia</th>
<th>Moderate dementia</th>
<th>Advanced dementia</th>
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Normal aging changes

- Name/word-finding difficulty (but stable vocabulary)
- Episodic (autobiographical) memory declines across lifespan
- Semantic memory declines in late life
- Implicit memory is unchanged across lifespan
- Slower processing; slower encoding of new info but preserved retention
- Decline with complex attention tasks
- Mental flexibility declines in late life
Mild Cognitive Impairment

- Problems with cognitive domains beyond what’s expected for one’s education and normal aging
- Can effect memory, language, thinking, judgment
- Problems do not impair one’s function (usual daily activities)
- Family and friends may begin to notice
Pathologic brain changes

Impairments sufficient to impact daily activities

Most common types of dementia

• Alzheimers dementia
• Vascular dementia
• Lewy body dementia
• Frontotemporal
  o Behavioral variant FTD
  o Primary progressive progressive aphasia
• Progressive supranuclear palsy
Dementia is a clinical diagnosis

- If you are concerned, ask for evaluation
- Background, education, clinical symptoms
- Time course and trajectory
- Ruling out reversible causes and illness, adverse medication effects, substance use, mental health problems, sensory impairments
- Dx made by cognitive, neurologic, functional assessment (rarely lab and brain scans)
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Considerations for caregiving

• Dementia medications have limited and underwhelming role in treatment
• Cognitive/physical/social activity more valuable (without risk of side effects or drug interactions)
• Avoid ‘talking down’
• Avoid ‘taking over’ tasks before necessary
• Avoid ‘speaking for’ loved ones before necessary
• Provide compensatory strategies and routines to maximize independence
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Planning ahead

- Comprehensive advance care planning early
  - Health decision-making
  - Finances, estate planning
  - Personal care, residential care

- Planning tools and conversation starters:
  - https://prepareforyourcare.org
  - theconversationproject.org
  - https://deathoverdinner.org
  - Death Café Corvallis

- Share
Thank you