Strategies to Optimize Communication with People with Dementia
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Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute
14th Annual Alzheimer’s Disease Update Conference
November 17th, 2016

Why We Communicate
• Ask Questions
• Share Ideas and Feelings
• Give Information
• Teach
• Learn
• Persuade
• Share needs
• Entertain
• Connect

Communication and AD
• In mild stages of AD
  – many aspects of communication are preserved
  – changes in language use and content
• Early “Cognitive-Communication” Problems
• Later problems with language comprehension and production

Retrospective studies show subtle language changes before AD diagnosis

Language characteristics/changes according to stages of AD

Form (grammar)

Content (semantics)

Use (pragmatics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Characteristics and Changes</th>
<th>Pre-MCI</th>
<th>MCI</th>
<th>Mild AD</th>
<th>Moderate AD</th>
<th>Severe AD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
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<td>Semantics</td>
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<td>(word retrieval, verbal fluency)</td>
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<td>Syntax</td>
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<td>(syntactic complexity, agrammatism)</td>
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<td>Phonology</td>
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<td>(phonetics, phonology)</td>
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<td>Pragmatics in Discourse</td>
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</table>

Communication and Mild AD
Form
• Grammar and sentence structure preserved.

Content
• Word finding problems, verbal fluency.

Use
• Difficulty giving directions, telling stories.
• Pronoun use and other non-specific language (“that thing”).
• Frequent requests for clarification and confirmation
• Difficulty comprehending abstract or complex concepts
Communication and Moderate AD

Form
- Difficulty comprehending complex grammar

Content
- Word finding, Naming
- Pronoun Use (comprehension and production)

Use
- Poor topic maintenance
- Reduced cohesion

Communication and Severe AD

Form
- Intact but simplified grammar in language production.
- Reduced comprehension of complex grammar.

Content
- Reduced comprehension of meaning.
- Word, sound substitutions and repetitions

Use
- Poor coherence
- Reduced or limited spoken communication
- Intact prosody
- Poor comprehension

Investigating the Effects of Communication Problems on Caregiver Burden

Caregivers and Communication

- Caregivers of individuals with AD report communication problems contribute to their stress (Rabins, 1992).
- Caregiver education about the communication effects of AD may improve coping and communication satisfaction (Ripich, 1994; Ripich, Wykle, & Niles, 1995).
- Use of communication strategies may improve function of individuals with AD (Wilson, 2013).

Caregiver training can make communication more effective and Improve Communication Satisfaction

- Caregivers use communication strategies effectively in daily interactions with adults with AD (Small, Grunow, Makela, & Hillhouse, 2003).
- Using communication strategies is associated with less frequent communication breakdowns (Small, Grunow, Makela, & Hillhouse, 2003).
- Communication strategy training (1) increases knowledge about communication and AD; (2) can result in more positive attitudes about adults with AD; and (3) can increase satisfaction of communication with adults with AD (Ripich, 1994; 1995).

### Verbal Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbal Strategies</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Proposition</td>
<td>Single direction, request, or instruction</td>
<td>&quot;Please turn on the water.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Propositions</td>
<td>Two directions, requests or instructions</td>
<td>&quot;Please get the towel and dry your hands.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-ended question</td>
<td>Caregiver’s question can be answered with yes/no</td>
<td>&quot;Can you turn the water on?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended question</td>
<td>Caregiver’s question allows for a more elaborate response</td>
<td>&quot;How do you brush your teeth?&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraphrased repetition</td>
<td>Caregiver restates previous message for clarification</td>
<td>&quot;Turn the taps on. Turn the taps to get some water.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verification question</td>
<td>Caregiver clarifies, verifies, or interprets resident's request or response</td>
<td>&quot;Are you telling me you're done?&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Communication Strategy Training

"FOCUSED"
Caregiver Training Program
(Ripich, D., 1994, 1995)

**Face-to-Face**
Make communication easier by reducing distractions.
- One-on-one conversations
- Speak face-to-face
- Maintain eye contact
- Turn down the tv, radio, tablets, phones
- Use hearing aids if applicable

**Orientation**
Help orient your partner to the conversation by:
- Introduce yourself
- Introducing the topic
- Repeating key words
- Giving time to respond
- Use a calendars and lists

**Continuity**
Help maintain communication and connections by:
- Continuing the same topic for as long as possible.
- Discussing concrete topics.
- Introducing new topics

**Unsticking**
When your partner is stuck trying to find a word:
- Ask you partner if he/she wants help unsticking.
- Suggest possible words.
- Ask, “Did you mean...”
- Repeat the sentence with the target word.

**Structure**
Structure questions to make meaningful response easier.
- Use short, direct questions and statements.
- Give simple response options (e.g., yes/no).
- Prove two options (e.g., “What would you like to watch? Baseball or the news?”)
Exchange
Help maintain the personal connection of communication.
• Begin with common, familiar topics.
• Maintain turn taking.
• Comment and ask questions to encourage communication (not to quiz).

Direct
Make conversation easier to understand by:
• Keeping sentences short, simple, and direct.
• Using keywords (names, places, events) rather than pronouns.
• Using gestures, facial expressions, and pictures.

Communication and AD
• While all aspects of language and communication can be affected by AD, many communication abilities are preserved in the mild-moderate stages of the disease.
• Communication is a collaborative activity and training caregivers can improve communication.

References and Communication Resources
References

Resources
• https://www.alz.org/national/documents/brochure_communication.pdf
• www.asha.org