Objectives

- Examine the retained abilities for sensory appreciation for persons with late-stage dementia
- Describe special considerations that apply to the use of sensory stimulation in vulnerable late-stage dementia persons
- List examples of alerting and pleasant stimuli for the various senses
- Recognize responses to sensory stimulation experiences and how to document these responses in visit notes
End-Stage Dementia – enhancing quality of life through sensory experiences
Presented by Ann Riesenberg, RN, MA, CHPN
November 19, 2008

Quality of life in advanced dementia is determined by attention to three main areas:

Obstacles to sensory stimulation experiences

- Severe impairment of both cognitive and functional abilities
- Focus on maintaining bodily functions and preventing medical complications
- Inability to “reach” those in late-stage dementia inadvertently leads to isolation
- Activities must be continuously adapted to the retained abilities and strengths of the individual
- Activities must be tailored to individual’s life history, likes and dislikes, former hobbies and interests

Enhancing Quality of Life in Advanced Dementia.
Volner and Bloom-Charette, 1999. pg. 9
Obstacles to sensory stimulation experiences

- Striking a balance between sensory deprivation and avoiding sensory overload is the goal
- Individuals with Alzheimer's cannot initiate or regulate activity – it is a caregiver responsibility

Late-stage dementia and retained abilities

- Sensory-stimulation intervention helps “eliminate excess disability through building on an asset, since the primary sensory area of the brain remain relatively untouched by Alzheimer's disease” (Bowlby, 1993)
- Sensory and visual cortexes are among the least damaged areas of the brain
- Sensory appreciation does not require higher cognitive processing
- Target population is late-stage dementia
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Special considerations when providing sensory stimulation

- Sensory props must be carefully screened to prevent choking hazards
- Alerting or arousing stimuli have the potential to elicit agitation and paranoia
- Steadily blinking or flashing light cannot be used as visually alerting stimuli

Special considerations when providing sensory stimulation

- The individual’s prior life experiences are important in identifying alerting or arousing stimuli
- The individual’s comfort needs must be met first
- Positioning of the individual and facilitator is very important
  - Quiet environment
  - Lap tray or over-bed table
  - Facilitator facing the individual
  - Stimuli within easy reach
Facilitator qualifications

- Any person with knowledge of dementia care who also has knowledge of the individual
  - RNs
  - Hospice aides
  - Social workers
  - Volunteers
  - Activity staff
  - Therapists
  - *Family members*

Frequency, time of day, session length

- Sensory stimulation is best offered
  - Mid-morning
  - Mid-afternoon
  - Early evening
- Each day one sense is stimulated
  - Monday – auditory
  - Tuesday – visual
  - Wednesday – tactile
  - Thursday – motion
  - Friday – smell and taste
- Session length limited to 10 minutes
Sensory stimulation procedure

- Welcome individual by name and explain what you are going to do
- Use individual’s first name every time a sensory prop in presented; identify prop
- Begin with presenting an alerting stimuli/prop from the sensory kit designated for that day of the week
- Observe for a response; allow one minute
- If no response, repeat the stimulus and wait another minute

Sensory stimulation procedure

- If still no response, use another alerting stimulus
- With no recognizable response after another minute, continue with alerting/arousing stimuli at one minute intervals
- Stop the session if nonverbal behavior indicates discomfort or agitation
- If the individual responds to the alerting stimulus immediately, move to a pleasant stimuli and observe carefully for a response
Sensory stimulation procedure

- When the individual responds, move on to another pleasant stimulus
- Continue presenting stimuli from the kit for as long as the individual responds for the 10 minute time frame
- Document the individual’s responses on the visit notes

Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Auditory
- Alerting – baby cries, rooster crow, whistling, knocking, squeaky sounds, hand clap, tinkling (spoon on glass), school bell, honking, party noisemakers
- Pleasant – laughter, bells of various shapes and sounds, wind chimes, reciting familiar prayers, poetry, old sayings, playing religious or patriotic music and the dementia person’s favorite songs
Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Visual

- Alerting – striking a match (only with permission), suspending and swinging a brightly colored object at eye level (streamers, tinsel); party streamers that unroll when blown, weighted wobbly objects, lining up objects and knocking over with a small ball
- Pleasant – puppets, pinwheels, tops, blowing bubbles, balloons, windup toys, battery operated mechanical stuffed animals, humorous eyeglasses, smiling faces, silly mask, clown nose, sequined fabric, glowing objects

Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Tactile

- Alerting – vibration, something cold, heavy/coarse items (sandpaper), sticky balls, contact paper, tape, feather under the nose, water wigglers
- Pleasant – feather or wool dusters, rabbit's foot, clay, Silly Putty, bubble wrap, marshmallows, dry leaves, wax paper, aluminum foil, silky scarves, soft fabrics, feather boas, large powder puffs, lotion, powder, whipped cream, shaving cream, pudding, things that can be heated (smooth rocks, wet washrag)
Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Sensations to increase body awareness

- Put lotion on the individual’s hands/feet and gently wiggle fingers and/or toes
- Nuzzle soft, fuzzy fabric or stuffed animal in crook of neck or against cheek
- Spray cool water on the back of hands, inside wrists and forearms
- Use a soft brush down the inside of the arm and across fingertips

Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Motion

- Alerting – a gentle puff of air in the face from an ear syringe, small battery operated mini-fan or hand fan, things that move immediately when touched, foam sponges, taut elastic toys, dominoes lined up
- Pleasant – balloon tied to wrist, squeezable things, expandables/retractables (coil key chain), things that can be easily bent or twisted, push button toys, bowl of water with floating things atop that can be pushed down
Examples of alerting/pleasant stimuli

Smell and taste
- Smell alerting – garlic, eucalyptus, peppermint
- Smell pleasant – floral scent, pine, strong spices (clove, dill, cinnamon), old familiar perfumes (Old Spice, Tabu, Chanel No. 5), baby powder, vanilla
- Taste alerting – sour (dill pickle juice, lemon, lime)
- Taste pleasant – candy flavorings, flavored teas, cinnamon, butterscotch, jellies/jams, fruit baby food, chocolate, peppermint

Responses to sensory stimulation

- Due to the severe cognitive and functional deficits in end-stage dementia, affected individuals have severely limited response capabilities
- Responses are frequently difficult to discern and may take a minute to be noticeable
- What constitutes a response? or How can I document the effects of a sensory stimulation experience?
  - Eye contact
  - Blinking
  - Turning head toward or away
  - Reaching out for stimuli
  - Changing facial expression
  - Verbalizing
Sensory stimulation

• Will have **no** impact on the progression of dementia
• Can rescue the individual with end-stage dementia from a barren psychosocial existence
• May help to decrease or increase vocalization and decrease depression
• Can help to “reach” an individual with end-stage dementia and draw him or her into the environment for a higher quality of life

References

• Enhancing the Quality of Life in Advanced Dementia. Volicer, L. and Bloom-Charette, L. (1999) Taylor and Francis Group Philadelphia PA