

Dementia

Definition: Dementia is defined by a loss of previous levels of cognitive, executive, and memory function in a state of full alertness

- Dementia has a slow, insidious onset, and is chronic, progressive, and irreversible.

Causes:

Following are major etiologic categories for the syndrome of dementia:

- **Dementia of the Alzheimer's type.** The exact disease of Alzheimer's disease is unknown, but several theories have been proposed, such as reduction in brain acetylcholine, the formation of plaques and tangles, serious head trauma, and genetic factors.
- **Vascular Dementia.** This type of dementia is caused by significant cerebrovascular disease.
- **Dementia due to HIV disease.** The immune dysfunction associated with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can lead to brain infections by other organisms. HIV also appears to cause dementia directly.
- **Dementia due to head trauma.** The syndrome of symptoms associated with dementia can be brought on by a traumatic head injury.
- **Dementia due to Parkinson's disease:** Parkinson's disease is caused by a loss of nerve cells in the substantia nigra of the basal ganglia.
- **Dementia due to Huntington's disease.** This disease is transmitted as a Mendelian dominant gene, and damage occurs in the areas of the basal ganglia and the cerebral cortex.
- **Dementia due to Pick's disease.** Pathology occurs from atrophy in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain.
- **Dementia due to other general medical conditions.** A number of other general medical conditions can cause dementia. Some of these include endocrine conditions, pulmonary disease, hepatic or renal failure cardiopulmonary insufficiency, fluid and electrolyte imbalance, nutritional deficiencies, frontal or temporal lobe lesions, uncontrolled epilepsy central nervous system or systemic infections, and other neurological conditions.
- **Substance-induced Persisting Dementia.** This type of dementia is related to the persisting effects of substances such as alcohol, inhalants, sedatives, anxiolytics, other medications, and environmental toxins.

Clinical Manifestations:

The following symptoms have been identified with the syndrome of dementia:

- **Memory impairment.** Impaired ability to learn new information or to recall previously learned information.
- **Impairment in abstract thinking,** judgment, and impulse control.
- **Impairment in language ability,** such as difficulty naming objects. In some instances, the individual may not speak at all (aphasia).
- **Personality changes** are common.
- **Impaired ability to perform motor activities** despite intact motor abilities (apraxia).
- **Disorientation.** Patient may feel disoriented regarding current place, time, or names of persons they are close with.
- **Wandering.** Because of disorientation, patient with dementia may often wander from one place to another.
- **Delusions** are common (particularly delusions of persecution).

Assessment and Diagnostic Findings

- **Complete blood cell count (CBC).** Abnormalities in complete blood cell count and cobalamin levels require further workup to rule out hematologic disease.
- **Liver enzyme levels.** Abnormalities found in screening of liver enzyme levels require further workup to rule out hepatic disease.
- **Thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) levels.** Abnormalities in thyroid-stimulating hormone levels require further workup to rule out thyroid disease.
- **Rapid plasma reagent.** Abnormalities in rapid plasma reagent (RPR) require further workup to rule out syphilis.
- **HIV serology.** Abnormalities in HIV serology and/or PCR require further workup to rule out HIV/AIDS

Pharmacological Management

- **Cholinesterase inhibitors.** Cholinesterase inhibitors are used to palliate cholinergic deficiency.
- **N-Methyl-D-Aspartate antagonists.** The only drug in the N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) antagonist class that is approved by the US Food and Drug administration is memantine; this agent may be used alone or in combination with AChE inhibitors.
- **Nutritional supplement.** Medical foods are dietary supplements intended to compensate specific nutritional problems caused by a disease or condition; caprylidene is indicated for clinical dietary management of metabolic processes associated with mild to moderate dementia.

Nursing Management

The nursing management of a client with dementia include the following:

Nursing Assessment

Assessment of a client with dementia include the following:

- **Psychiatric interview.** The psychiatric interview must contain a description of the client's mental status with a thorough description of behaviour, flow of thought and speech, affect, thought processes and mental content, sensorium and intellectual resources, cognitive status, insight, and judgment.
- **Serial assessment** Serial assessment of psychiatric status is necessary for determining fluctuating course and acute changes in mental status, interviews with family members should be included and can be crucial in the treatment of infants and young children with cognitive disorders.

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