



The Person Behind the Diagnosis: Person-Centered Care in Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias

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Alzheimer's disease refers to a progressive condition that affects memory, thinking, and the ability to carry out everyday tasks. It is the most common form of dementia and can range from mild forgetfulness in early stages to a complete loss of independence in the later ones. Other related dementias, such as vascular dementia and Lewy body dementia, share many of these features and present similar challenges for patients and their families.

Caring for someone with dementia goes far beyond managing symptoms. It requires understanding who that person is, what matters to them, and how to keep them engaged and comfortable throughout the course of their illness. This is where person-centered care plays a vital role.

What is person-centered care?

Person-centered care is an approach that places individuals at the heart of all decisions related to their treatment and daily life. It recognizes that a person with dementia is still a whole person with a history, preferences, relationships, and feelings, and that these should guide how care is provided.

Rather than focusing only on what a person can no longer do, person-centered care looks at their strengths, what brings them comfort and what gives their day meaning. Families and caregivers are encouraged to share information about the person's life story, routines, and values so that care can be truly tailored to individuals.

Understanding behavioral changes

People with Alzheimer's disease often experience changes in behavior such as restlessness, agitation, withdrawal, or disturbed sleep. These changes can be disturbing for both individual and those around them. In many cases, these behaviors are a way of communicating an unmet need, whether it is pain, boredom, loneliness, or a feeling of being unsafe.

Person-centered care encourages caregivers to look beyond the behavior itself and ask what might be causing it. Simple adjustments, such as changing the environment, offering a familiar activity, or providing gentle reassurance, can often make a significant difference without need for medication.

Cognitive support and meaningful Activity

Keeping the mind engaged is an important part of dementia care. Activities that draw on long-term memories, such as listening to familiar music, looking through old photographs, or participating in light household tasks, can bring comfort and a sense of purpose.

Reminiscence-based activities and simple structured routines help to reduce confusion and anxiety. These approaches work best when they reflect what the person genuinely enjoys rather than what is convenient for the caregiver. Even in the later stages of the disease, small moments of connection and engagement matter greatly.

Supporting families and caregivers

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease at home can be rewarding, but it is also demanding. Family caregivers often take on this role without formal training, and over time many experience exhaustion, emotional stress, and a sense of isolation. Recognizing and addressing the needs of caregivers is an essential part of person-centered dementia care.

Education about the condition, practical guidance on daily care, and access to support groups can all help caregivers feel less overwhelmed. It is equally important to plan ahead while the person with dementia is still able to express their wishes, so that their preferences for future care can be respected.

The Role of the care team

Good dementia care involves more than one person or profession. Neurologists, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, and community support services all have a role to play. When these professionals work together and communicate well, the person with dementia receives more consistent and thoughtful care.

Care settings also play a part. Familiar surroundings, clear signage, good lighting, and a calm atmosphere can reduce confusion and help the person feel more at ease. Small changes to the environment can have a meaningful impact on daily wellbeing.

Respecting dignity and autonomy

A person with dementia deserves to be treated with dignity at every stage of their illness. This means involving them in decisions about their care as much as possible, listening to what they say, and taking their preferences seriously even when communication becomes difficult.

Dementia does not take away a person's need for connection, respect, and kindness. Person-centered care is a reminder that how we care for someone matters just as much as what we do for them medically.

Conclusion

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias present real and lasting challenges for patients, families, and healthcare teams. Person-centered care does not offer a cure, but it offers something equally important, a way of caring that sees the whole person,

honors their identity, and supports their quality of life at every stage of the illness. Embedding this approach into everyday practice is one of the most meaningful contributions a care team can make.