



Anosognosia: Denial of Deficit in Dementia

By Dawn Lakamsani, LCSW.

“My mother is driving me crazy! Doesn’t she know how impaired her memory is?” The answer many times is no. Anosognosia refers to the loss of the ability to recognize the presence of any cognitive deficit in those who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease or other types of dementia. This is not to be confused with denial of illness but rather an inability to recognize the presence of impairment because the part of the brain that controls reasoning has been damaged.

This presents enormous challenges for families who are faced with protecting their loved ones from themselves as they continue to engage in the same activities as before they became impaired. For example, an individual with Anosognosia may no longer have the insight, reasoning ability, or judgment to be driving safely, but they believe they are fully capable. The family may then have the unenviable task of taking steps to see that their loved one no longer drives even as it creates tension within the relationship. Worse yet, the family may not take the appropriate steps in order to avoid this tension.

The awareness of deficit continues to decline with disease progression. The person who is unaware of deficit is also unlikely to take steps to compensate for it. Families must learn how to negotiate and communicate productively with their loved one under these difficult and confusing circumstances. Confronting the individual with Anosognosia is not recommended, as the reaction is likely to be defensive, disbelieving, and even hostile. The family can be taught techniques to ease tension and keep relationships open. Distraction is very useful because the individual may ask a question but quickly forget that they are awaiting an answer for that specific question. Then, answering questions in general terms rather than specific terms is also useful. The less detail the better.

Recognizing that Anosognosia is another facet to cognitive impairment and learning the nuanced communication skills to deal with it will ultimately mean better care for clients and a more positive outcome for their families.

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Structured Activities: Important to Living with Alzheimer's

(Source: BCM) - Scientists at Baylor College of Medicine explain that a structured environment is key to easing some of the sleep-related problems facing people with Alzheimer's disease.

The most common sleep problem for those with the disease is a fragmented or erratic sleep pattern that usually occurs in the later stages of the illness. Waking up during the night or not being able to sleep at an appropriate bedtime becomes a serious problem when the person with Alzheimer's disease roams the house, unfamiliar with his or her surroundings.

"A primary contributor to the sleep problem is lack of day time stimulation and opportunities for socialization," said Dr. Mary Kenan. Many people with Alzheimer's disease struggle to maintain a daily schedule on their own. This can contribute to day time napping which can then lead to wakeful nights.

Caregivers can help people with Alzheimer's disease avoid erratic sleep habits or night time wakening by establishing a strict bedtime and a definite waking time. They can also help them increase activity during the day. They might consider supervised walks in the park or enrollment in a wellness program specifically for those suffering from dementia.

For full story: www.bcm.edu/news/item.cfm?newsID=1106 or find it on www.bethanyHOF.org



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