



Forget- Me-Not

Introduction

"Let's go back, I'm tired." said an old fragile lady, who is a mother to my friend during their family outing one fine Sunday evening. At first, her family might have thought she was just exhausted or daydreaming but realization hit them when she started to be aggressive. She has just hit her husband's head ordering him to bring her back home. That was when they realized that something really peculiar must have happened affecting her brain which resulted in such behavior and action. Later, she was unfortunately diagnosed with dementia at just the age of early 60s. Dementia is a syndrome usually of a chronic or progressive nature that leads to deterioration in cognitive functions such as the ability to process thoughts. It affects the memory, thinking, orientation, comprehension, calculation, learning capacity, language and judgment. The impairment in cognitive function is commonly accompanied by changes in mood, emotional control, behavior and motivation. Dementia results from a variety of diseases and injuries which affect the brain, such as Alzheimer's disease or stroke. It brings a big impact and burden on the physical, psychological, social and the economical aspect not only for the patients themselves but also for their caretaker, family and society at large. There is often a lack of awareness and understanding of dementia, resulting in stigmatization and barriers to diagnosis and care. Therefore, in conjunction with the Penang Dementia Awareness Day, the Clinical Research Center of Hospital Seberang Jaya collaborated with the Penang Dementia Association in organizing an event called *Forget-Me-Not* on 16th October 2022 at the Community Center, Lebuah Acheh.



by Melati Desa

Forget-Me-Not Activities

The initiative was started by the Minister of Health, Yang Berbahagia Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar, when his father-in-law, the former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was diagnosed with dementia. The Minister of Health had urged that this disease should be given attention among the public. All Malaysian health organizations are advised to carry out plans as an eye-opener to Malaysians in general and families of dementia sufferers in particular. With the theme of awareness and care for those suffering from the disease, Hospital Seberang Jaya and it's clinical research center department had organized a charity project as an effort to slow the progression of dementia. A number of interesting activities were conducted during the event that included batik coloring contests, Chinese calligraphy, wrapping glutinous rice flour, flower arrangements and others. All the activities involved cognitive power and hand

movement. Such activities are said to help patients slow down the progress of rapid forgetfulness or senility.

Apart from the activities mentioned above, health screening services such as randomized blood sugar level, blood pressure, body mass index were also provided to the participants. One of the NGOs named Penang Dementia Association also offered knowledge to care for the elderly with disabilities and how to dress them with limited mobility and so on. The physiotherapy department from Hospital Seberang Jaya also offered exercises and mobility training for patients with restricted movement in a safe and effective way. In addition to the knowledge imparted by expert doctors and the experience shared by caretakers of dementia patients, visitors had also gained a variety of other basic knowledge on how to prepare themselves if any of their family members suffered from dementia.



Reference: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia>

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Signs and symptoms

This section includes a brief overview of the signs and symptoms of dementia and how to identify them early. The signs and symptoms of dementia can be classified into three phases:

Early phase: This phase is often overlooked. The common symptoms may include forgetfulness, losing track of time, and becoming lost in familiar places.

Middle phase: The signs and symptoms become clearer as dementia begins to affect their cognitive functions such as:

- => Becoming confused at home
- => Having increasing difficulty with communication
- => Needing help with personal care

=> Experiencing behavioral changes, including wandering and repeated questioning

Late phase: It is the phase of near total dependence and inactivity. Memory disturbances are severely impaired. At this level, the physical signs and symptoms become more obvious and may include:

- => Becoming unaware of the time and place
- => Having difficulty recognizing relatives and friends
- => Having an increasing need for assisted self-care
- => Having difficulty walking
- => Experiencing behavior changes that may escalate and include aggression

Treatment and care

There is currently no treatment available to cure dementia. Anti-dementia medication and disease-modifying therapies have limited efficiency and are labeled for Alzheimer's disease. The principal goals for dementia care are:

- => Early diagnosis in order to promote early optimal management
- => Optimizing physical health, cognition, activity and well-being
- => Identifying and treating accompanying physical illness
- => Understanding and managing behavior changes

Conclusion

Since dementia is a disease that occurs naturally and sadly there is no treatment for it, it is our responsibility as caregivers to patients or even to ourselves in future to slow down the progress of dementia.

Providing information and long-term support to carers.

Risk factors and prevention

Studies showed that people can reduce the risk of cognitive decline and dementia by being physically active, not smoking, avoiding harmful use of alcohol, controlling body weight, eating a healthy and balanced diet and maintaining healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Other additional risk factors for dementia besides aging are depression, social isolation, low educational attainment, cognitive inactivity and air pollution.



The writer was a second runner-up in flower arrangement

As it is a disease that affects the brain's ability to generate signals and responses, in other words 'cognitive', any activity that can enhance brain function is said to help dementia patients. For retirees or those over the age of 65, it is recommended to always be active not only physically but also mentally. This group is advised to always think of ways to meet their daily schedule in addition to attending light leisure classes that can make one's time filled with thinking. Caring for dementia patients is a big challenge that not everyone is able to deal with. Therefore, it is recommended that the caregivers attend seminars or courses to strengthen their understanding on patient care and management. One of the early recognitions of dementia is when you start to forget your important daily routine which ends up in a repetitive cycle. A simple example is the misplacement of your car keys. If you often forget where your car keys are stored, whether it is hanging on the wall, in your handbag or in your pocket, then you have the early potential to suffer from dementia. So as a conclusion, always be alert of your important belongings, any repeated misplacement is an indication of an early stage of dementia.



Simulation on dressing up as a patient who has restricted movement of her arm



Flower arrangement by a sharp and healthy 75-year-old lady