

DEMENTIA TERMINOLOGY

“Communication breakdown” in Alzheimer’s disease and other causes of dementia are consistently listed among the stressors for caregivers. Here is a list of some of the terminology used in describing the affects of the disease, some of which limits the person who has dementia.

Affect: the outward manifestation of a person’s feelings, usually referring to facial expression and posture.

Aggression: A forceful, attacking action; may be physical or verbal and may be directed at people or at objects.

Agnosia: The inability, in the absence of any direct impairment of the sensory organs, to recognize familiar stimuli experienced by means of senses. The inability may be related to any of the senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Visual, auditory, and tactile agnosias, however, are most common.

Alexia: A disturbance in the ability to read. Primary ALEXIA is related to visual AGNOSIA, whereas secondary ALEXIA is due to deficits in language. Many people who have dementia can read aloud fluently but have no comprehension of the material they are reading.

Anomia: The inability to recall the correct word or phrase to express an intended thought or to identify a familiar object accurately.

Aphasia: A deficit or loss of the ability to express oneself by means of speech or the written word in the absence of any muscular or intellectual impairment.

Apraxia: The inability to carry out skilled and purposeful movements in the absence of any physical impairment or paralysis.

Catastrophic Reaction: An excessively anxious, fearful, or despairing reaction to frustration resulting from an individual’s inability to perform a task or understand a situation.

Circumlocution: “Talking around the issue,” a characteristic of speech common to persons suffering from ANOMIA. In their effort to express a thought or identify an object, they describe it by its use, location, or other characteristics.

Cognitive Functions: The intellectual process, by which one becomes aware of, perceives, expresses, and understands ideas. These functions involve all aspects of perception, memory, reasoning, and language.

Confusion: Bewilderment and lack of orderly thought and reactions based on fact. Also, the inability to act and choose decisively.

Cortex: The outer layer of a body organ. The brain’s outer layer is called the cerebral cortex. It is most highly developed in humans and is the seat of higher intellectual functions. It is the part of the brain that is primarily affected by the process of the Alzheimer’s disease.

Delirium: An acute episode of confusion and disorientation.

Delusion: A persistent but untrue belief or perception that is held by the person even though it is illogical and not real.

Disorientation: The lack of accurate knowledge concerning time, place, one’s identity, and/or the identity of familiar others. The lack of knowledge regarding the purpose of events may also be included in this definition.

Echolalia: Automatic and often persistent repetition of words and/or expressions just heard by the individual; acting as an echo.

Hallucinations: Sensory perceptions that are not the result of external stimuli. They may affect any of the senses and they are very real to the affected person but to no one else. They are frequently confused with illusions.

Illusions: Misperceptions that result in a mistaken impression about things. Everyone experiences illusions at one time or another, but they occur with more frequency in people with impaired perceptual abilities.

Inertia: The inability to begin a task or initiate a movement in the absence of a concrete stimulus.

Motor Planning: The ability to conceptualize, organize, and carry out a particular series of movements toward a specific end.

Paraphasis: The use of an inappropriate word to express a thought or identify an object or person. Although the person's intention is correct, the wrong word comes out.

Perception: The ability to interpret accurately and correctly information received through the senses.

Perseveration: The persistent repetition of an action associated with the inability to stop unless an outside force intervenes.

Praxis: The ability to carry out skilled, organized movements.

Receptive Aphasia: The inability, in the absence of sensory or intellectual impairment, to understand spoken or written language.

Spatial Orientation: The ability to know where one is in space and relative to objects in one's environment. Also the ability to perceive how objects relate to one another, either in front, behind, on, under, to the left, or to the right. It is associated with directionality, which is an appreciation of movement toward, away from, to the left, to the right, upward, and downward.

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Resources:

National Elder Law Foundation – www.nelf.org

National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys – www.naela.org

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