Supporting Veterans with Dementia and Caregivers During the Era of COVID-19

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Overview

- Description of COVID-19 in older Veterans with dementia
- Obstacles to stress management due to COVID-19
- Unique challenges for older Veterans living with dementia and their caregivers
- VA-based resources
- Community-based resources
• How often do you work with older Veterans living with dementia and their caregivers in your current setting?

- Not at all / Never
- Some of the time
- Most of the time
- Nearly all of the time
COVID-19 Prevalence

8 in 10 reported COVID-19 deaths have been adults 65 years or older\(^2\)

NYT, Nov 5, 2020\(^1\)
Vulnerability Factors

- Chronic medical conditions
- Mental illness, SUD
- Racial / ethnic disparities
- Cognitive impairment
- Homelessness
- Low SES
- Caregiving needs
- Restricted social support and community resources
Vulnerability Factors

Underlying conditions among adults hospitalized with COVID-19


Source: MMWR. 2020 Apr 8:69(early release):1-7
Case Example: Mr. G

82 year old Veteran who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (mild/early stage). Lives in the community with spousal caregiver. Mrs. G phones and informs Veteran’s primary care provider that he fell in the bathroom 3 days ago, is more confused, and has been spending a lot of time in bed sleeping. Today, he developed a cough and a fever of 100.0 F.
COVID-19 Symptoms

SYMPTOMS OF CORONAVIRUS
(COVID-19)

Know the symptoms of COVID-19, which can include the following:

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fever
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell

cdc.gov/coronavirus
COVID-19 & Dementia

Delirium

- Changes in consciousness
- Impaired attention
- Sleep/wake cycle disturbance
- Hallucinations
- Emotional disturbance
COVID-19 & Dementia

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cdc.gov/coronavirus
COVID-19 & Dementia

• Difficulty communicating symptoms to caregiver\(^5\)

• Potential signs include changes in the following\(^6,7\):
  • Cognition
    – increased confusion, slower processing speed
  • Behavior
    – Anxiety, agitation, aggression
    – Apathy, depression, increased sleep, fatigue
  • Function
    – Decline from baseline
To what extent has COVID-19 impacted the mental health of your patients with dementia and their caregivers? Mental health over the past few months is:

- Much worse
- Some worse
- No change
- Some better
- Much better
Stress Management

• COVID-related stress is unique
  – Pervasive; stress surrounding uncertainty
  – Can bring on stressful acute life events and exacerbate chronic stressors
Stress Management

• Major obstacles for Veterans with dementia and caregivers
  – Limited access to social support
  – Reduced opportunity for behavioral activation
  – Restricted access to usual care resources

• Disruption of daily routines and structure
Veterans with Dementia

COVID-19 STRESS

**Behavior**
- Boredom
- Loneliness
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Irritability

**Cognition**
- Confusion
- Disorientation

**Sleep**
- Sleep difficulty
- Daytime napping
Coping Skills

• Increasing / maintaining routine
• Menus of pleasant activities
• Scheduling appropriate behavioral activation
  – Digital behavioral activation (e.g., podcasts, online videos & music)
• Hygiene reminders
• How confident do you feel in recommending COVID-19 specific resources for Veterans with dementia and their caregivers?

☐ Not at all confident
☐ A little confident
☐ Somewhat confident
☐ Very confident
VA Resources

• VA Mobile Apps for Mental Health
  – VA mental health self-management mobile applications (apps) teach evidenced-based skills
  – Older adults benefit from these approaches\(^9\)\(^{12}\)
  – Veterans with dementia need more assistance

Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP
Older adults’ barriers to using mobile apps

- Sensory Changes
- Knowledge
- Cognition

- Accessibility features
- Stylus and other tools
- Define terms & symbols
- Instructional manuals
- Use clear, simple language
- Provide handouts

Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP
VA Sharepoint: [Tech into Care Sharepoint](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Geri-mobile)

Link to request materials: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Geri-mobile](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Geri-mobile)

How to Download Mobile Apps

Step-by-Step Guides for PTSD Coach* and Mindfulness Coach

Symbols Glossary
- Passcode and Finger Print ID (password) creation (within settings)
- Privacy information and settings (within settings)
- Settings (access to general, security, and accessibility settings)
- Create a contact

*PTSD Coach 3.0 printable reference available

Slide content courtesy of Christine Gould, PhD, ABPP
Community Resources

• Veterans with dementia
  – Alzheimer’s Association Online Tools
    • https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/online-tools
  – Administration for Community Living
    • https://acl.gov/COVID-19
  – State resources
    • Ex. Dementia Alliance of North Carolina\textsuperscript{14}
      – Virtual Tours Links
      – Activity Box Kits
      – Minders\textsuperscript{15}: Indoor activity ideas for older adults with dementia
      – Coloring pages
Potential Impact of COVID-19 on Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia

- Increased Caregiver Burden
- Changes in Social Support
- Technology Stress
- Reduced Access to Respite and Resources
- New Caregiver Responsibilities
- Implementing Infection Prevention Protocols
- Reduced Self Care Activities
- Increased Isolation

Increased Caregiver Burden
Supporting Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia

• Assess and address issues related to caring in COVID
  – Psychoeducation re: COVID in persons with dementia
  – Develop COVID Preparedness Plan
  – Expand current support systems
  – Set realistic expectations

• Reach out to the caregiver, don’t wait for them to reach out to you
Supporting Caregivers of Veterans with Dementia

Identify alternate caregiver and potential alternate LAR

Compile a list of Veteran’s care needs, wants, and preferences

Develop quarantine plan

Update advance health care directives

COVID Preparedness Plan
• Caregivers
  – Program of General Caregiver Support Services
  – Virtual support groups
  – Caregiver Support Program Peer Support Mentoring Program
  – VHA Office of Rural Health
    • https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/vets/resources.asp#dem
  – Elizabeth Dole Foundation
    • Hidden Heroes
      – https://hiddenheroes.org/coronavirus/
    • Caregiver Action Network
Community Resources

• Caregivers
  – Gerocentral
    • https://gerocentral.org/clinical-toolbox/covid-19-resources/
  – Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving
    • https://www.rosalynncarter.org/programs/covid-caregiving/
  – Alzheimer’s Association
    • https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care
  – Family Caregiver Alliance
References


References


References


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