Agitation in Older Adults With Dementia

Agitation in older adults with dementia is a distressing and common problem. It is associated with high rates of caregiver distress and may be an important precipitant of institutionalization. Certainly, the presence of agitation signals discomfort in individuals with dementia, and their quality of life likely is compromised. Indeed, agitation and aggression may foster social isolation as caregivers (both formal and informal) adopt avoidance strategies or employ restraints or inappropriate medications in an effort to control the related behaviors.

The article in this issue of the Journal of Gerontological Nursing by Marian Rowe, PhD, RN, and Danita Alfred, RN, MS, entitled, “The Effectiveness of Slow-Strock Massage in Diffusing Agitated Behaviors in Individuals With Alzheimer’s Disease” contributes to the understanding of this important problem, describing its nature, prevalence, associated factors, and possibilities for management. The intervention (slow-stroke massage) yielded a nonsignificant reduction of mean scores on the majority of agitation behaviors during the treatment period. Nurses are encouraged to explore and test other nonpharmacologic, easily administered, and cost-effective treatments in an effort to build our therapeutic armamentarium. I suggest that readers with additional interest in this topic also consult the Expert Consensus Guideline Series, “Treatment of Agitation in Older Persons with Dementia,” a special report of Postgraduate Medicine, April, 1998 (Alexopoulos, Silver, Kahn, Frances, & Carpenter, 1998).

REFERENCE

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