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ARE THERE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH ALZHEIMER PATIENTS?

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Introduction: Diagnosing Alzheimer Disease (AD) is a long-lasting process, mainly due to the variability of initial symptoms (i.e. memory problems, speech difficulties, behavioral changes). Patients are usually either unaware of their difficulties or attempting to conceal them.

Aims: We wanted to establish whether, based on existing knowledge, a better understanding of the leading causes of miscommunication can overcome communication barriers for AD patients.

Objectives: We tried to summarize the existing recommendations and gold-practices and to contract them into key messages in order to improve quality of communication.

Method: We performed a systematic overview of medical literature (PubMed search, disclos* OR communic* NOT communicate AND Alzheimer), selecting of the 516 resulting titles those papers focused on doctor/patient and doctor/caregiver communication issues.

Results: Specific communication requirements were identified for effective collaboration between

- (1) physician and patient,
- (2) physician and patient's caregivers/family and
- (3) caregivers/family and patient.

A minimal set of communication skills and predictable courses of action was further developed, depending on

- (a) best practices and
- (b) recommended practices.

Conclusions: Although communicating with people with Alzheimer is difficult, quite often the communication barriers are mainly due to an inaccurate perception of the disease and of patient limitations and disabilities. Understanding the mechanisms involved and acquiring certain interpersonal habits may significantly improve communication effectiveness, particularly in mild and moderate AD.