

Poetry, Arts in Health, and Alzheimer's Dementia

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Alzheimer's Dementia (AD) is defined as, "a progressive disease resulting in the loss of higher cognitive function" (Martone & Piotrowski, 2019). AD is primarily characterized by impaired cognitive function related to plaque in the brain, the production and accumulation of particular proteins, which interfere with brain function and cognitive ability, including functionality associated with memory and language (Borenstein & Mortimer, 2016). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of persons over 65 living with Alzheimer's Dementia, the most common form of dementia, doubles every five years (CDC, 2020). Research emphasizes the palliative nature of care and treatment, as no cure currently exists (Borenstein & Mortimer, 2016). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that treatment addresses maintaining mental function, managing behavioral symptoms, and slowing or delaying the symptoms of the disease. There is growing evidence that interventions may slow the progression of Alzheimer's through mental, physical, and social activities (CDC, 2020). Poetry is, at varying times and in varying contexts, a mental, physical, and social activity. For persons with Alzheimer's Dementia, poetry can be used in support of finding a voice, for those who have lost it, and for crafting from familiar language a stable identity, when the cognitive function is progressively diminished (Wilkes, 2016). Poetry, as applied in the arts in health context of the health care continuum of care of persons with Alzheimer's Dementia, engages receivers of the spoken or read poetic word in a cognitive experience grounded in metaphor and language in such a way as to evoke and embed memory, stabilize and enhance quality of life, and facilitate collaborative exchanges with caretakers.

Poetry for Remembering, Affirming, and Memorializing the Self for Persons with AD

A person with Alzheimer's Dementia can be engaged through language which is familiar.

Regular mental and social activities encourage the stabilization of the disease progression (Borenstein & Mortimer, 2016). Brain activity helps to stabilize brain function, while deterioration of function does not stop, activities which provide connection and engagement stimulate cognitive function (Wu, 2016)). In the Alzheimer Poetry Project established by poet Gary Glazner in 1997, memory recall is facilitated through the use of classic and well know poems of the patient population's generation. Poems from childhood or well-known of an era or time which resonates with the group are recited by the poet, who also infuses the reading with eye contact, humor, physical gestures, movement, and song. As the familiar verses are read and repeated in a call and response fashion the individuals demonstrate recollection through smiles and other facial expressions, by engaging more fully as the poem progresses and incorporating self-prompted body movement and motion with the recitation (APP, 2020). These expressions of joy are a product of the arts in health activity and are a part of the connectedness fostered by the arts in health experience (Glazner, 2018; Bolton, 1999; Wu, 2016). Poetry in arts in health has an application in memory stabilization by facilitating an experience which can offer transcendence and recollection with the faculties available to the participant with Alzheimer's.

Poetry to Craft the 'New Normal' for Persons with AD

Poems have rhythm and cadence which lend to the fullness of the experience in a whole person sense (Hellberg, 2015). Metaphor as a method of normalizing the abnormal supports the person with Alzheimer's in adjusting to less certainty by facilitating a grounding experience (Halpern et al., 2013; Halpern et al., 2002). Poetry encourages one to simply be present, to receive and accept creative experience, without requiring particular action, ability, or skill. Poetry provides a format for the use of the arts as a way to promote the person-centered, shared

value among the members of the care group, to cherish and treasure our elders by facilitating the telling and memorializing of their stories and their lives through an arts in health experience (Ford, 2012; Glazner, 2020). Interventions to establish preferences and bring about grounding of personality can serve to stabilize and thereby, normalize, quality of life for persons with Alzheimer's Dementia (Halpern et al., 2008; Mangione, 2013). In this way the arts in health experience offers transcendence beyond one's illness to a whole person perspective (Bucciarelli, 2020; Sonke, 2019; Ford, 2012). According to the Alzheimer's Poetry Project initiated by Gary Glazner and established in assisted living facilities throughout the United States, poetry as an art form captures and memorializes a moment and stabilizes one in a moment, it allows a person to simply be present, to act as audience (Glazner & Kaplan, 2018; NPR, 2004). Dr. Heilman in his definition of creativity as a combination of convergent and divergent thinking, refers to being an audience as being a receiver of creativity; a receiver of an experience with the thread of universality (UF, 2020).

Poetry: "Versions of poetic pictures, painted by minds, created by souls, spoken by mouths . . ." (Boguszewski, 2008). Poetry relates to cognition in that it is language based and communicates experience through metaphor. The use of metaphor allows for the bending of reality and creates relationships through the lens of the participant's experience. There is no right or wrong way to experience a poem, 'poetic license' as it were, extends to audience as well. In the Poetic Brain (Clark-Evans, 2003), poems are analyzed for their contributions to social perception of relationships between heart and mind relevant to the historic and social context in which they were written. Poetry is used to describe emotive forces of the mind and heart. Poetry evokes a consciousness, symbolism in poetry can be drawn upon to make sense of one's mental, emotional, and motivational states (Clark-Evans, 2003). Similarly, the institutional healthcare

setting and our modern historic context, also provide an interpretive setting through which poetry can create meaning and an interpretative lens for processing a patient's state (NOAH, 2017; Sonke, 2019). The symbolic language of a poem offers a point of origin for comparison of and interpretation of one's own circumstance or condition.

Poetry to Foster Cohesion and Support within the Care Group for Persons with AD

Arts in health interventions with poetry positively impact quality of life of both patients and caregivers by creating grounding experiences for persons living with Alzheimer's Disease. The nature of Alzheimer's care makes it an ideal setting for arts in health experiences, since care is guided by the concepts of enhancing self-efficacy, self-affirmation, and stabilization, arts in health activities can take a significant place in the continuum of care (VPM,2018; CDC, 2020). By facilitating joy, providing connection, and fostering opportunities for self-affirming and self-efficacy building experiences arts in health activities create an improved sense of well-being which can normalize a person with a terminal illness' quality of life (Sonke et al., 2019). Having these experiences makes the life of the human being living with AD more normal and person centered, rather than illness centered (Rogers, 1979; Bolton, 1999; Glazner, 2020; APP, 2020), serves to humanize the healthcare experience (Bucciarelli, 2020), and can facilitate points of recognition and connection with caregivers, friends, and family members .

Experience with poetry for people with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers has improved communication and bonding in ways that enhance the care experience and normalize quality of life (Hellberg, 2015). In the activities of the Memory Café, poet Glazner, prompts the participants to recall experiences and expressions which he strings together in poetic format to produce a group product based on the collective recollections of the members of the care

community (Galzner, 2018; VPM, 2018, WFAA, 2018). By tapping into the life of the person living with AD an arts in health practitioner can help to keep memories ‘present’ by giving the person an opportunity to memorialize their experiences before they are unable to recall them (WFAA, 2018; Sonke et al., 2019). Creating artifacts based on memories provides a reference point for the individual and their care group, including friends and family members, for the values, interests, individuals that have had meaning throughout life and may contribute positively to their quality of life as they live with AD (Bolton, 1999; WFAA, 2018, APP, 2020, VPM, 2018).

Conclusions

Arts in health as a field supports a whole person perspective (Rogers, 1979) and a scope of practice that focuses the participant on an experiential activity to positively impact their experience with healthcare (Sonke et al., 2019). Arts in health use of poetry with persons living with Alzheimer’s Dementia are present in the United States (Glazner, 2020) and are proving to be successful in stabilizing and normalizing quality of life for participants with Alzheimer’s Dementia (WFAA, 2018; VPM, 2018, Glazner, 2018). Further research and collaborative opportunities around the use of poetry with persons living with Alzheimer’s Dementia are present in the context of intervention development, design, and implementation. Formalization of data collection about the number of existing programs, their operating paradigm, and funding sources provides cross sector collaborative opportunities for the field. Poetry serves as a trigger of cognition, a use of language, and a resource of memory stabilization. (Kaplan & Glazner, 2019; Halpern et al., 2013; Halpern et al., 2002). The progression of the disease leads to cumulative impairment of cognitive function related to accumulation of proteins in the brain

(Martone & Piotrowski, 2019; CDC, 2020; Borenstein & Mortimer, 2016). Alzheimer's dementia is a disease of the brain for which there is currently no cure and the disease leads to death (Martone & Piotrowski, 2019; CDC, 2020; Borenstein & Mortimer, 2016). As such, Healthy People 2030 sets national healthy objectives for the United States population and Goal: Improve health and quality of life for people with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease (HHS, 2020). Treatments and plans of care are palliative in nature (CDC, 2020); however, as one patient participant in the Alzheimer's Poetry Project noted, a person living with AD is not seeking a cure, they want to enjoy the life they have; to normalize or improve their quality of life (VPM, 2018; APP, 2020).

There are care facilities throughout the State of Florida for persons with Alzheimer's Dementia (Florida Care Planning Council, 2020) which could house arts in health poetry based programs for persons with AD. According to the website for the Alzheimer's Poetry Project, programming has occurred in over half of the states in the U.S., as well as internationally, offering services to over 35,000 persons (APP, 2020). Language creates an opportunity for grounding in the moment (Walker, 2016; Bolton, 1999). Through the contextualization of experience in metaphor, poetry allows for metaphor to shape and reflect the regularity with which persons with AD's experiences are outside of the 'norm' serving in this way to normalize quality of life for persons with Alzheimer's Dementia. Further research and collaborative opportunities exist to build upon existing programs to develop and design effective arts in health interventions using poetry with persons living with Alzheimer's Dementia which will support stabilized, normalized, and enhanced quality of life.

In the healthcare experience of a person living with Alzheimer's Dementia arts in health practices utilizing poetry can serve to stabilize, normalize, and enhance quality of life.

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