

Language in Dementia

Dementia is a devastating condition, with profound cognitive changes affecting every aspect of an individual's functioning. The loss of communication is one symptom above others that causes distress and impacts negatively on quality of life, yet it is still one of the least understood aspects of dementia. This book undertakes a comprehensive examination of language and communication in individuals with cognitive impairment and dementia. Each chapter covers a specific neurodegenerative disorder, and addresses the epidemiology, aetiology, pathophysiology, prognosis and clinical features, along with the assessment and treatment of these disorders by speech-language pathologists. Many examples of language from individuals with neurodegenerative conditions are included, to explain clearly the effects of dementia on communication, and there are exercises at the end of each chapter, to develop language analysis skills. The book is suitable reading for all medical and health professionals, including speech-language pathologists, clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists, geriatricians, neurologists and psychiatrists.

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Preface

Dementia is a devastating condition that leaves no part of the lives it affects untouched. The profound cognitive changes that occur in dementia affect every aspect of an individual's functioning, leading to increased dependency and reduced quality of life. While all other causes of death are in decline in the United States, deaths related to Alzheimer's disease – the single biggest cause of dementia – are increasing relentlessly. Moreover, there is little prospect that this situation will improve any time soon, with all major studies pointing to further increases in the years ahead. It is not an exaggeration to say that dementia poses the single biggest public health challenge of our time, with even well-resourced healthcare systems struggling to address it.

In the absence of pharmacological interventions that can reverse and halt the damage of neurodegenerative dementias, dementia care still relies for the most part on the management of symptoms. These symptoms are many and varied, affecting language and communication, feeding and swallowing, mobility, and all manner of cognitive processes including perception, memory and reasoning. The loss of communication with the individual who has dementia is one symptom above all others that causes distress and negatively impacts an individual's quality of life. Yet, language and communication are still some of the least well understood aspects of dementia, both in families affected by dementia and among the medical and health professionals who provide care to clients and their families. This book has been written with a view to addressing this lack of understanding in the hope that improved management of language and communication difficulties can go some way towards alleviating the burden of dementia.

This book is aimed at all medical and health professionals who are involved in the management of individuals with dementia. This is reflected in detailed sections in each chapter on the epidemiology and aetiology of neurodegenerative dementias as well as the pathophysiology, clinical features, prognosis and cognitive profile of these disorders. Reflecting the volume's emphasis on language and communication, there are extended sections on the language and communication profiles of each main type of dementia and the

management of communication and swallowing disorders by speech-language pathologists. Readers are continually exposed to the language of individuals with different dementias, a feature that is lacking in other published volumes on language in dementia. It is hoped that exposure to these language samples will improve identification of aspects of impaired language, leading to improved assessment, diagnosis and intervention in clients. An extensive glossary, annotated suggestions for further reading and end-of-chapter exercises with answers complete the learning package for readers of the volume.

It is almost certainly the case that as more of us develop dementia in years to come, the field of dementia care is going to expand considerably. The management of clients with dementia by speech-language pathologists will be an increasingly important part of that expansion. It is hoped that through its emphasis on language and communication, this book can contribute to the clinical education of students in speech-language pathology and to the knowledge of researchers and practitioners in the field. For it is only by increasing our understanding of the ways in which language is disrupted in neurodegenerative dementias that we can have any prospect of addressing the challenges that this disruption brings.

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