



Tuality Healthcare
Building a healthier community.
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info

mental health

Finding Time

A Day in the Life of a Patient

Care giving for a memory impaired or mentally ill elder is a 24 hour a day job. Dementia is a puzzling disease. Always changing, always tiring. It can be a challenging situation for caregiver and patient. The following is a brief look at what a memory impaired elder might experience in a day on our Geriatric Psychiatry unit. “Elmer” is a representation of a man with mid-stage Alzheimer’s disease.

Morning (7am)

Elmer, like many patients with Alzheimer’s, has been out of bed for three hours. He has already visited with staff and been gently redirected from phoning loved ones. He needs help to brush his teeth and change from mismatched pajamas. After three explanations from a patient nurse, Elmer swallows his essential heart medications.

Breakfast

Elmer eats breakfast with a group other patients. The atmosphere is cheerful and welcoming. The newspaper is read aloud. Medicine is handed out, many people receive medicines crushed in food. Staff evaluate patient’s ability and provide assistance as needed to cut food, open bottles, and initiate eating. Elmer shares stories with peers and does not have to worry about keeping up with a schedule. Seated next to him, a man with Parkinson’s Disease is provided with adapted utensils and plates to help maximize independence at meals.

Mid Morning

Elmer visits with a man in a tie who introduces himself as the doctor. Elmer does not recognize him, despite the fact the psychiatrist visits with him daily. The man

is friendly and Elmer feels comfortable telling him about his knee pain and memory loss.

After the meeting Elmer is restless. He begins to try doors and talk about going to work. Just as he begins pacing, he is invited to morning exercise group by an Occupational Therapist. He smiles and throws balls. He is able to help an elderly lady toss a beanbag through a target. He stretches and improves his strength and mobility.

Meanwhile Social Workers are meeting with families to provide support and education for discharge planning.

Lunch

Lunch is a busy time. Family and friends visit. Elmer wonders why his family is not with him. A nurse sits and talks to him about his children while he eats lunch. He is reminded to drink a lot of fluids. Elmer needs help to the bathroom and remains continent due to a planned bathroom routine and staff assistance that minimize accidents. Now that it is the middle of the day, he is encouraged to call loved ones. He takes his medicine after a careful explanation from a nurse.

Mid Afternoon

After careful treatment team evaluation, all patients are placed into appropriate groups. For example, people with depression may attend an interaction and emotional processing group, while people with movement disorders spend 1:1 time with therapists to prevent falls.

Elmer is able to follow a group schedule on the board. Therapy is designed to help Elmer feel successful. Just as he is getting agitated, staff take him to the therapy garden. He talks of growing up in the country and is able to show others how to plant seeds and grow herbs. In the right environment, Elmer avoided needing sedating medicine.

After group, Elmer is restless again. He packs his things. In his rush and confusion, he is incontinent. Using a technique called “validation” a therapist redirects him and helps him take an afternoon shower. Elmer keeps his dignity and participates in his own care. Through careful evaluation, the therapist can determine the right level of care for Elmer’s self-care needs after discharge from the hospital.

During late afternoon, patients engage in a functional task group based on each patient’s own interests. To allow for continued evaluation, they work on standardized projects. Elmer laughs as he sands a wooden box. A woman next to him works on weaving a place mat. An Occupational Therapist keeps track of how well they can read and follow directions. All information gathered is used in discharge planning, so that Elmer can live in a place that meets his needs.

Dinner

A certified nursing assistant helps Elmer find a table with a few other gentlemen. On the way, the man with the tie introduces himself as the doctor. Elmer doesn’t recognize him but is grateful for the concern. Nurses speak of current events and provide a social activity at dinner.

Night Time (7PM)

Many patients are already in bed, while others are watching a movie. Evening medications are distributed with any changes made by attending physicians. Families visit, receiving updates from care staff. A patient is yelling out and reassured by two staff members. Elmer is already asleep.

Sometime that night Elmer awakes and wanders into the hall. Half dressed, he tries to make coffee. In his mind it is morning. Night staff are there. Encouraged to sit and rest, he shares a cup of decaf coffee and old stories with the nurse at the end of the hall. As he tires, he is helped back to bed.