

RECOGNISING DEMENTIA

A brief clinical overview



What is dementia?

- Not a single entity
- Syndrome associated with progressive memory loss
- Any age
- Many pathologies

DSM IV

“Overall decline in intellectual functioning, including difficulties with language, simple calculations, planning and judgement, and motor skills as well as loss of memory.”

ICD 10

- A progressive decline in memory
- AND
- A decline in other cognitive abilities from a previously higher level of functioning
 - Preserved awareness of the environment
 - Emotional decline , social behavioural change

Causes of dementia

- Numerous
- Primary – atrophy / damage of brain cells
- Vascular
- With Lewy bodies
- Related to poisons
- Related to infectious diseases
- Related to structural abnormalities of the brain

What about the genes?

- Importance of the genetic contribution varies, still learning just how much
 - ❖ Early-onset Alzheimer's
 - ❖ Late-onset Alzheimer's
 - ❖ Multi-infarct dementia
 - ❖ Frontal lobe
 - ❖ CJD

What are the symptoms?

- Memory loss
- Aphasia
- Apraxia
- Agnosia
- Abstraction and complex behaviour
- Personality change
- Emotional change
- Psychotic symptoms

I can't seem to remember things

- When and where
- Dead and alive
- Dates and days
- Where did I put.....?
- What have you done with my.....?
- Why have I come in here?
- A loaf of bread and some ham, please

Memory loss

- Registration, retention, recall
- Short term / immediate
- Recent
- Remote
- Gradual, recent →→remote
- Orientation

Attention /Concentration

- Ability to focus on something specific, either internal or external
- Often unaware
- Adds to difficulties with memory
- Not only dementia!

Aphasia

- “I can’t get my words out”
- “He talks rubbish sometimes”

- Impairment or loss of language
- Expressive
- Receptive

- MMSE

Apraxia

- ✓ Sensory function
- ✓ Motor function
- ✓ Intent

----- but can't do it

- Sunday lunch
- Gardening tasks

Other things

- Showing poor judgement
- Ignoring dangers
- Becoming more outspoken / withdrawn
- Not interested in.....
- Tearful / laughing inappropriately
- Seeing things.....

What next?

- Have recognised problems
- General health check
- REFER ON AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE!

“Penn Hospital next stop....”

- Further investigation
- Confirm diagnosis
- Exclude any other treatable physical / mental health contributions
- Consider supportive drug therapies
- Make relationships
- Educate
- Support

Resources and literature

- RCPsych web site
- Alzheimer's Society
- Alzheimer's Research UK
- BBC Health
- NICE
- Google!
- Almost endless.....