



Health Bulletin



Music, Photos And Art Helping Loved Ones With Alzheimer's Disease

(NAPSA)—Memories are powerful—simply reflecting on a precious time with a loved one, a favorite song or a great vacation moment can bring on feelings of happiness, security and relaxation. For the millions with Alzheimer's disease, however, recollection of these cherished memories is not always possible.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative brain disorder characterized by memory problems and impairments in everyday activities. An estimated one in eight persons over age 65 has the condition, often requiring spouses, children and even grandchildren to act as caregivers for their loved ones.

As a result of difficulties accessing their memories, people with Alzheimer's disease often experience depression, become upset or agitated and may have a number of behavioral issues. For caregivers of people with the disease, this can be an added challenge.

Reminiscence Therapy

Today, there are important therapies that can help make Alzheimer's disease more manageable for both caregivers and their loved ones, and may improve their ability to retrieve long-lost memories. One of these—reminiscence therapy—involves using personal items such as old photos, home videos and music to rekindle their loved ones' memories from the past and create a sense of familiarity and safety.



First used in the 1980s, reminiscence therapy has been found to benefit those with Alzheimer's disease by stimulating mental activity, decreasing feelings of being alone, easing agitation and creating positive interactions between a caregiver and a loved one with Alzheimer's disease.

In fact, studies have shown that cognition and mood among people with Alzheimer's disease improved within four to six weeks after beginning reminiscence therapy, with some indication of improved functional ability. A recent study published in the *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias* suggested that reminiscence therapy can also improve the quality of life in people with the disease.

“Reminiscence therapy provides caregivers with an opportu-

nity to go beyond their daily duties by interacting with their loved ones in a pleasurable and more satisfying manner,” said Dr. Jay Ellis, director of Neuroscience Research of the Berkshires, in Pittsfield, Mass. “It also provides an effective way of reintroducing loved ones to their earlier selves.”

Information and ideas on how you can conduct reminiscence therapy are available from physicians and assisted living facilities, as well as from national organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) and the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (www.alzfdn.org).

Medication Is Essential

Reminiscence therapy acts as a strong complement to treatment with medication. As a first step, caregivers should work with their loved ones' physicians to ensure they have a proper diagnosis and an effective treatment regimen.

Today, there are two classes of prescription medicines available to treat Alzheimer's disease. These medications each address a different chemical in the brain. Studies have shown that treating people with moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease with a combination of medications from these two classes can yield benefits in activities of daily living, as well as behavioral and cognitive improvements. Information about combination therapy is available at www.AlzheimersOnline.com.