Alzheimer's Tips for Case Managers, With Joyce Beedle

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Alzheimer’s Tips for Case Managers, With Joyce Beedle, Video/90 min. Produced by the Oregon Department of Human Resources, Seniors and Disabled Services Division, Alzheimer’s Demonstration Project. Distributed by Oregon Geriatric Education Center, Institute on Aging, Portland Street University, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97207-0751, E-mail: owensj@pdx.edu. Purchase (video) $65.

Today, Alzheimer’s disease or similar dementias affect approximately one out of every three families in the United States. Case managers are being challenged to assess the increasing needs of individuals who have Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers, and to suggest appropriate services that maintain an appropriate functional level and quality of life. Alzheimer’s Tips For Case Managers, and its accompanying guide, is a basic introduction appropriate for case managers who are not familiar with the disease and its progression and who have a case load that includes individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The video does not address the clinical diagnosis of the disease, disease stages and severity levels, or the variety of special care options available for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias.

The audiovisual is divided into four sections, Alzheimer’s disease statistics, a discussion of reversible versus irreversible dementia, the progression of the disease, and tips case managers can use when assessing care needs to simplify and ease the daily routine for persons with the disease and their caregivers. The accompanying video guide is similarly arranged and its four sections mirror the content in the audio presentation. A single-speaker, standing-lecture format is used and the presentation is lengthy. The speaker describes anecdotes and practical experiences encountered in the field; however, there is no audience discussion or client vignettes. The content presented in the video and guide can be used to train case managers. The sections can be incorporated into freestanding training modules and supplemented with discussions and additional materials appropriate to the level of case manager experience.

The section on reversible dementias includes a useful mnemonic to identify treatable Alzheimer’s type symptoms including drug reactions, infections, and nutritional and dehydration problems. Common warning signs of possible dehydration and several tips on encouraging fluid intake are provided. Case managers are advised to look for sudden and/or subtle changes in client behavior that may be reversible and are advised to report these to the individual’s physician. The stages of human growth and development are used to explain the loss of acquired skills and abilities occurring as Alzheimer’s disease progresses. Using a diagram with age categories beginning with childbirth through adolescence and above, the increasingly complex reflexes, instincts, reasoning skills and actions associated with each category are identified. As the disease progresses and the individual begins to slip backwards down the diagram, the visual association of age-appropriate behavior to understand level of functioning is helpful. Inclusion of vignettes displaying various behaviors and demonstrating appropriate case manager and caregiver responses would have facilitated understanding.

There was limited discussion about what case managers should do when individuals mix reality and fantasy and become frightened or are at risk of harm. Tips are provided to appropriately simplify and manage the daily care needs of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. Emphasis is on maintaining lifelong habits, creating consistency in daily routines and communicating through appropriate body language and familiar words. The video guide contains a sample daily routine that can be individualized for use. Case managers are introduced to the importance of the physical surroundings and the need to reduce stressful stimuli and maintain an even balance in order to reduce panic and catastrophic reactions. Finally, case managers are reminded of the importance of recharging, maintaining energy, and reducing the stress in their own lives.

These sections provide useful information in understanding the disease and helpful tips in providing care. However, if they are to be used for training, they should be supplemented with additional material. There is no discussion of how case managers should use their skills to improve service delivery or assess the need for supplementary services (e.g., congregate and home-delivered meals, chore or homemaker services), adult day care, respite care, or caregiver support groups.

This audiovisual provides a basic introduction to Alzheimer’s disease that case managers, family caregivers and other health professionals can use in caring for an individual with the disease. Its major weakness is that the viewer remains a passive listener. The video provides no active engagement in applying the content either through analytical questions and discussion or through interactive case studies and vignettes.

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