Knowledge is Power: Confronting Mild Cognitive Impairment & Why It Matters

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Session Objectives:

• Understand Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and how it is connected to Alzheimer’s disease and other neurocognitive disorders
• Learn effective strategies to assist individuals with day-to-day challenges associated with MCI
• Build a chronic disease management plan specific to MCI utilizing the Alzheimer’s Association Flowchart

Understanding Mild Cognitive Impairment
What is Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)?

- Early stage of memory loss or other cognitive ability loss (such as language or visual/spatial perception) in individuals who maintain the ability to independently perform most activities of daily living.
- Cognitive changes serious enough to be noticed by the person affected and by family members and friends, but may not affect the individual’s ability to carry out everyday activities.
- Characterized by subtle changes in memory and thinking and is sometimes confused with normal aging.
- Viewed as a broad set of symptoms making diagnosing challenging for affected individuals and physicians.
- People with MCI may have a higher risk of developing dementia. However, some individuals with MCI revert to normal cognition or do not have additional cognitive decline.

Types of MCI

MCI is classified as one of two types based on a person’s symptoms:

- **Amnestic**: Memory issues are the predominant symptom
- **Nonamnestic**: Other cognitive issues, such as impaired language, visuospatial abilities, or executive function are predominant symptoms

Causes may include…

- Medication side effects
- Sleep deprivation
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Neurologic, neurodegenerative, systemic or psychiatric disorders
- Stroke or other vascular disease
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Alzheimer’s disease
Outcomes after diagnosis…

Outcomes can vary depending on the underlying cause of MCI and other factors:

- May be a transitional state between normal cognitive aging and dementia
- May revert to normal cognition or remain stable
- May resolve when medication is changed or discontinued

MCI due to Alzheimer’s Disease

A distinct condition:

- Symptoms are no different than syndromic MCI
- Has a very specific underlying cause (distinct biological changes that lead to the damage and death of nerve cells in the brain)
- The symptomatic precursor to Alzheimer’s dementia

Statistics:

- 5 million Americans have MCI due to Alzheimer’s disease
- 30% to 50% of people will progress to Alzheimer’s dementia 5-10 years after diagnosis
- People with the amnestic MCI subtype may be more likely to progress to dementia

Strategies to Connect and Support
Diagnosis: MCI due to Alzheimer’s Disease

Now what?

What is our role in serving persons living with this diagnosis?

• Support them with a person-centered approach as they face the future and make plans for the road ahead
• Connect them with a broad array of resources as early in their disease process as possible
• Understand the experience of living with Alzheimer’s disease in the earliest stages of disease progression
• Confidently interact with the person and provide hope as they work to continue living their best life

Common issues in early stage…

Telling Others: Social Stigma
Making Decisions: Engaging professionals/clinicians
Life Changes: Challenges finding support resources
Looking Ahead: Want to remain active and engaged
A dignified approach…

- Talk directly to the person diagnosed.
- Tell them the truth.
- Take their memory/cognitive change concerns seriously, regardless of their age.
- Explain the purpose of different tests and what they hope to learn.
- Talk about the diagnosis in plain but sensitive language.

A dignified approach…

- Assist them with coordination of care with other providers.
- Give them tools for living with this disease.
- Work with them on a plan for healthy living.
- Recognize that each individual’s experience living with this disease is unique.
- Understand that living with Alzheimer’s or other dementia is a journey, not a destination.

Developing the support team…

Things to Consider:

- Why it is important to delegate decision-making to someone the person trusts?
- What should be discussed?
- Who would the individual want on their support team?
- Do the people being considered for the support team accept the diagnosis?
- Are they willing to take part in disease education and meetings to discuss current and future needs?
- Is the person comfortable sharing their care preferences with those on their support team?
- Is the individual comfortable making their needs known and accepting feedback from their support team when concerns are expressed?
Developing the support team...

Things to Do Now:
• Assist the person in identifying people they would like on their support team.
• Ask permission to speak with support team members and include them in support plan development.
• Encourage a meeting with everyone involved.
• Recognize strengths that each support team member has and leverage that in the development of the support plan.

Who Else Might Be on the Team?
• Consider Professional Support or Community Resources

Chronic Disease Management of MCI

Disease management goals for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia...

Active management includes:
• Appropriate use of available treatment options.
• Effective management of coexisting conditions.
• Coordination of care among physicians, other health care professionals and lay caregivers.
• Participation in activities that are meaningful and bring purpose to one’s life.
• Having opportunities to connect with others living with dementia, support groups and supportive services are examples of such opportunities.
• Becoming educated about the disease.
• Planning for the future.

Case Study: Finding support resources

Margo is 60 years old and has been diagnosed with MCI due to Alzheimer’s disease. She lives alone in her home that she owns and she works part-time. Margo is having trouble managing her medications and paying her bills. She sees multiple health care providers for other chronic health conditions that, until recently, have been stable. Margo finds herself experiencing increased concerns with anxiety and is worried that she will no longer be able to work or live alone. This anxiety has increased after a couple of experiences. One was misplacing perishable items in her kitchen and finding them spoiled. The other was having paid the same bill multiple times. The anxiety attacks are resulting in increased absences from work, causing her even more anxiety. She does not have the financial means to retire right now and her saving/retirement funds will not provide for her future needs if she taps into them too early. Margo does not have a strong network of support to help her address these concerns. She has two adult children who live out of state and her relationship with them is estranged. She states that she is interested in learning how she can continue living independently for as long as possible but also would like to start planning for her future.

- What are the concerns that need to be addressed as they relate to the disease management goals?
- How can these concerns be met with resources available through the Alzheimer’s Association?

Considerations for early stage supports…

Education/Information:
- Disease, symptoms, treatment, and prognosis
- Programs and resources to help newly diagnosed persons and their families cope with the impact of the disease
- Information that offers hope and empowerment

Online Resources:
- Assessment tools that address a families unique needs

Support Options:
- Counseling, Coaching and Support Groups for both newly diagnosed person and care partners (together and separated)
- Technology-Based Support (telehealth, GPS location, etc.)
- Care Planning for the future
- Driving Safety with Cessation Planning and other Safety Planning (Occupational Therapy Services)

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Questions?

Thank you...
Alzheimer’s Association
- 347 Madison 800.272.3900
- Website alz.org
- MCI Flowchart alz.org/whatis/dementia/early-stage-programs
Healthy Living with MCI Speaker Series. adrc.wisc.edu/mci
- Nathaniel Chin, MD. Dementia Matters Podcast
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