

Alzheimer's Disease

The Silver Lining

by James K. Curto

How could anything good possibly accompany a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease? This is a progressive (always gets worse), terminal illness for which there is no cure. Memory, reasoning, judgment, and other cognitive skills inexorably decline. Success in treatment is only measured by slowing the rate of progression. How in the world could there be a "Silver Lining"?

Here it is. It's only a modest statement, but sometimes we take what we can get: *High levels of relative well-being may be a realistic expectation during the entire course of the disease.*

The "well-being" referenced in the statement, above, can have a number of dimensions. First, although there may be a great deal of frustration and psychological pain for a person with Alzheimer's Disease, the disease is not known to cause pain by itself.

Important side-note: Pain from other causes (headache, arthritis) is very likely inadequately treated in people with Alzheimer's Disease. Without the ability to express oneself and complain about pain in words, analgesics are likely not given enough. Pain may be simply suffered or expressed as troublesome behaviors may, in fact, be an expression of not being comfortable or of being in pain.

Second, people with Alzheimer's Disease, like the rest of us, can and should be able to fulfill the six psychological needs as described in my last article. These needs are for attachment, love, comfort, identity, inclusion, and occupation. Fulfillment of these needs on a regular basis certainly adds to a feeling of well-being.

Third, people living with Alzheimer's typically don't worry about what happened in the past or worry about what will happen in the future. Many simply "live in the moment" of the present, enjoy themselves, and show real contentment. They are not burdened by the feelings of sadness and loss their caregivers often know.

We don't like to talk about people "suffering from" this disease. We think of people "living with Alzheimer's". And they **are** living. Having pleasant days filled with enjoyment is a reasonable goal that is often achieved.

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