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Essential Oils Reduction of Dementia-Related Behavior Disturbances: A Case Study and Literature Review

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Purpose:

Over nine million people worldwide were diagnosed with dementia in 2015. Behavioral disturbances or neuropsychiatric symptoms can affect between 30% and 90% of all dementia patients and are difficult to manage. Pharmacological management can have untoward effects such as somnolence, memory impairment, dizziness, nausea and vomiting and may not be completely effective. Non-pharmacological approaches to manage neuropsychiatric symptoms should be explored. Essential oils, via aromatherapy inhalation, effect the limbic system of the brain and have great potential for use in patients with dementia.

Methods:

Patient H., a 52-year-old black male on hospice with a diagnosis of dementia with behavioral disturbance (and a history of traumatic brain injury from a falling tree branch) presented with increasing aggression, intermittent violent outbursts and physically attacking his spouse despite being pharmacologically treated with Seroquel, Depakote and Haldol. Patient H. was assessed and an essential oil spritzer was recommended for use twice daily and prn with a goal to decrease agitation.

Results:

Patient H. would become agitated, yell, curse and swing his fists in attempts to hit hospice staff, but within 20 minutes of using the essential oil spritzer, he became calm, thus allowing for nursing assessments, vital signs, bathing and dressing. Patient H. continued to respond positively to the essential oil spritzer after four months of use. His spouse reported that while using the spritzer, she is able to get more rest and complete household tasks without having to try to calm him down. She is pleased to use this complementary therapy along with his prescription medications.

Conclusion:

Case study results showed the use of Lavandula angustifolia (Lavender), Citrus reticulata (Mandarin), Anthemis nobilis (Roman Chamomile) and Cananga odorata (Ylang Ylang) in a solution of Hamamelis virginianas and spring water, as an aromatherapy spritzer, effective in decreasing behavioral disturbances in dementia and should be further studied as a complementary therapy for this patient population.

Title:

Essential Oils Reduction of Dementia-Related Behavior Disturbances: A Case Study and Literature Review
Abstract Summary:
In 2015, over 9 million people were diagnosed with dementia worldwide. Dementia can be accompanied by aggression or violent behavior intractable to standard treatment (e.g. Seroquel). In one case study, essential oils reduced aggressive behavior within 20 minutes of application. This case study and literature review will be discussed.

Content Outline:
I. Introduction
   a. Dementia as a global concern as people are living longer and diagnosis is on the rise
   b. Dementia with and without behavioral disturbances
II. Body
   A. Dementia management
      1. Pharmacological
      2. Non-pharmacological - Aromatherapy
   B. Dementia Case Study
      1. Patient background
2. Pharmacological management

3. Aromatherapy
   a. Essential oils selected
   b. Essential oil chemical constituents and therapeutic properties

C. Literature Review
   1. Essential oils and dementia findings
   2. Essential oils and behavior/aggression findings

II. Conclusion
   a. Case study outcome
   b. Literature findings supporting case study outcome

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**Author Summary**: Dawn Langley-Brady is a nurse of 29 years. She is also a Board Certified Advanced Holistic Nurse, Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse, and Certified Clinical Aromatherapy Practitioner. She holds a Master's of Science in Nursing Degree and is a PhD Candidate at Augusta University where she is also a full-time instructor in the College of Nursing.