

Terms and Definitions

There might be some terms that you do not understand, while you are in your facility. You might be asked to visit someone for a specific reason, and it helps to have an understanding of what the terms mean. The following definitions are very basic; if you would like to now more please ask your facility, or consult a reliable reference book. (Definitions are taken from the Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta Handbook and Webster's Dictionary)

PT – Physiotherapist

OT – Occupational Therapist

RT – Recreational Therapist

RN – Registered Nurse

LPN – Licensed Practical Nurse

ADL – Activities of Daily Living; functions such as dressing, feeding, grooming.

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; depending upon the stage of the disease, an individual might be ambulatory and have mild appearance of weakness. In the later stages severe physical deterioration occurs, and can include visual, auditory and mental dysfunction. Depression is not uncommon.

ALS – Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease); the person might present in a physically weekend condition, with difficulties breathing and speaking.

Alzheimer's Disease – A form of dementia or mental impairment resulting from a progressive irreversible brain disorder. The disease is frequently presented by memory loss, disorientation, speech and language difficulties.

Ambulatory – Being able to walk without assistance.

Amputee – Refers to a person who is missing one or more limbs through congenital defect, accident, or surgery.

Anxiety – Apprehensive expectation about life circumstances; the individual might present as jittery, shaky, restless, or express worry about matters. He or she might experience panic accompanied by shortness of breath, heat palpitations, sweaty & cold, clammy hands. The person might seem "keyed up" or "on edge", could appear irritable. Some persons with an anxiety disorder are particularly afraid and anxious in social situations.

Aphasic/Dysphasic – Clinical terms used when the individual has impairment of either expressive or receptive language; the person might have difficulty understanding what is said (receptive), or have problems expressing themselves verbally.

Arthritis – Degeneration and inflammation of the joints resulting in pain and stiffness.

Autism – A severely disabling condition marked by an extensive withdrawal from reality; characteristics include bizarre behaviour, aggression and little use of language.

Catheter Bag – A container that collects fluid from a person's body (usually urine by a catheter tube).

Cerebral Palsy – A disability resulting from damage to the brain before or during birth; a range of impairments might result, including lack of muscle coordination and speech impairments.

C.O.P.D. – Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, emphysema; the individual has difficulty breathing and might wear nasal tubing attached to an oxygen supply; perfume sprays and other chemical sprays should not be used when visiting a person with COPD.

Cognitive Impairments – An impairment of the thinking process; altering a person's perceptions, judgements, etc.

Compulsive Behaviour – Behaviour which is repeated over and over, without the person's ability to control it; this might include hand-washing, opening and closing doors, moving papers or other materials about, etc.

Confusion – A mental state in which thought, memory, and orientation might fluctuate or be disordered as a result of physical or psychological conditions.

Congenital – Refers to a condition or defect occurring at birth

C.V.A. – Cerebral Vascular Accident; more commonly referred to as a stroke; might result in paralysis of limbs and/or impaired speech.

D.A.T.S. - Disabled Adult Transportation System; provides transportation usually in vans which have been modified to accommodate persons who use wheelchairs. The vehicles have ramps for access, and are equipped to secure the chairs for an individual's safety during travel.

Delusion – A belief, which is maintained despite factual evidence, to the contrary; the person might believe they are God, or that someone is trying to poison them; etc.

Dementia – Loss of intellectual abilities affecting social and occupational functions. It is sometimes treatable ; might be drug induced or caused by tumour or infection, related to emotional, metabolic, or nutritional reasons.

Depression – A mental state or disorder characterized by sadness, loneliness, lack of energy, inactivity, feelings of hopelessness and despair, difficulty with concentration and thinking; can be caused by physiological, biological, or social factors.

G-Tube – A tube which may be through the mouth or nose; usually used for feeding; can also be used for cleaning out the stomach (e.g. toxic overdose)

Hallucination – A false perception, which can be auditory (hearing sounds that are not there), or tactile (sensing the touch of something which is not there); hallucinations might be part of schizophrenia, alcohol withdrawal, or drug induced.

Frail – A term used to describe a condition where the physical strength and/or senses have declined as a result of aging or illness.

Immune Suppressed – An inability of the body's natural defence system to fully fight off diseases.

Incontinent – Inability to control bladder and/or bowel functions.

I.V. – Intravenous; the introduction of a fluid substance into a vein

Manic-depressive/Bipolar Disorder – A form of mental illness characterized by alternating hyperactivity and depression.

MRSA - any of several strains of a bacterium (*Staphylococcus aureus*) that are resistant to methicillin and related antibiotics (as penicillin) and may cause usually mild infections of the skin or sometimes more severe infections (as of the blood or lungs) especially in hospitalized or immuno compromised individuals.

Multiple Sclerosis – A neurological disorder of unknown cause; affecting various parts of the nervous system; most notable signs might be tremor, poor muscle coordination or jerky movements, ataxia (poor balance, problems walking), speech impairment (slurring or drawn-out speech), and visual impairment.

NPO – Nothing by mouth

Orthopedic – Pertaining to the spinal cord or bones

Palliative – Refers to efforts to relieve or soothe, not curative; a person with a terminal illness or a condition for which there is no known cure, might be in a palliative care facility.

Paranoid – A pervasive and unwarranted tendency to interpret the actions of people (or pets) as deliberately demeaning or threatening; might be easily alighted and quick to react with anger, bear grudges, read hidden meaning into benign remarks or events, expect to be exploited or harmed by others, and question without judgement, the loyalty or trustworthiness of friend or others around them.

Parkinson's Disease - a chronic progressive neurological disease chiefly of later life that is linked to decreased dopamine production in the substantia nigra and is marked especially by tremor of resting muscles, rigidity, slowness of movement, impaired balance, and a shuffling gait -called also paralysis agitans, Parkinson's, Parkinson's syndrome. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parkinson's%20disease>)

Psychosis – A severe emotional illness in which there is a departure from the norm in terms of patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Schizophrenia - A psychotic, complex brain disorder affecting feelings, thought, and behaviour; symptoms include delusions, hallucinations, and disturbances of thinking, odd habits, and deterioration in daily function.

Sensory Loss – the loss of one or more senses, such as sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.

Socially Isolated – An individual who is psychologically separated from others, either by not having visitors, or not being psychologically assessable, having a tendency to withdraw from others, not inviting nor participating in social conversations or activities.

Spastic – Pertaining to or characterized by recurrent and continuous spasms; e.g. Persons with cerebral palsy might have spastic paralysis.

What is Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's is an illness that causes changes in the brain cells. It can affect men and women of any race and not always the elderly. There is no known cause or cure for Alzheimer's. Patients with this disease may have memory difficulties. They may lose the ability to make decisions or look after themselves. Alzheimer's affect their ability to communicate and express themselves. You may not be able to tell how much the client understands about what is being said to them.

The only things that are known for certain about Alzheimer's disease is that it will affect each person differently. It is not a normal sign of aging and the symptoms progress and get worse over time.

What can we expect from a client with this disease?

When working with a client who has Alzheimer's, it is important to remember a few things, since changes in behavior can be gradual. At any given time a client who you have visited may change. His/Her language and speech are often affected first. This can be very frustrating for the individual so he/she may be upset or angry at times. Try to involve them in normal conversation and activities. Use the person's name and touch them or hold a hand when you speak. You may not get a response but they may appreciate you being there. When they try to communicate, they may become confused or frustrated, often repeating themselves or trying to find the word. Speak calmly and keep a sense of humor. Don't argue or try to reason with them and don't take some things they may say personally.

As the disease progresses, patients lose more and more control over their daily lives. Let them make some decisions: "Would you like a visit? Would you like to pet the dog? Give him a treat?" If they answer no, sometimes very strongly, take this as a sign of them asserting their right to make their own decisions and as an appropriate response for the situation and move on to the next person.

Later, the person may become delusional, anxious or suspicious. They may try to lash out verbally or physically. They may accuse someone of stealing from them. They may wander into unsafe areas such as elevators or stairways. Try to distract them to ward off some of these behaviors. Always be watchful for sudden actions which may be dangerous to you or your pet. Certain patients may be unsuitable for visiting on a given day. Check with the staff of the facility if you are unsure of the person you will be visiting with.

In the final stages of Alzheimer's, patients may lose movement and coordination. They may cease to recognize or respond to you. Speak to them, touch their hand, and let them see the pets. Sometimes there is a response that you are unaware of. Never underestimate the power of human and animal contact!

Resource:

Alzheimers Canada Video. The Alzheimers Journey – Modules 1,2, & 3
Toronto. Ontario.