Overview

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a number of diseases. It isn’t a specific disease, but rather a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, and social abilities severely enough to interfere with daily functioning. Daily functions include balancing the checkbook, keeping house, driving the car, involvement in social activities, and working at one’s usual occupation. There may also be changes in personality and emotions.

Contrary to popular belief, dementia is not a normal outcome of aging, but is caused by diseases that affect the brain. The brain can sustain permanent damage or death of the brain’s nerve cells, or neurons.

Alzheimer’s is the most common type of dementia.

Tips

• Treat people with Alzheimer’s or related dementia with the same respect and consideration as other patrons.
• Allow enough time to meet the needs of patrons with memory issues.
• Be aware of the wide range of behaviors associated with Alzheimer’s and related dementia issues.
• Help increase community awareness of Alzheimer’s and related dementia with displays, programs, books, and other materials.
• Have sufficient signage to allow patrons to be independent.
• Do not share your anecdotal stories to demonstrate that you understand; this may convey the wrong message. For example, do not mention “my aunt with the same thing.” Each situation is different; please respect that difference.
• Form partnerships with agencies, professionals, and self-advocates to assess and meet the needs of people with Alzheimer’s and related dementia.
• Take care to correct negative stereotypes surrounding the disease.
• Reach out to residential care facilities, state and local aging agencies, and activity professionals.
Resources

IGARD’s toolkit is designed to provide guidance and inspiration for library services to people with Alzheimer’s and related dementia.

The Alzheimer’s Association site is a source for statistics, information and support. Download their annual report and understand the effect Alzheimer’s is having in your state here.

Keys to Engaging Older Adults was created by the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services in response to the concerns of librarians across the country who provide services for the growing numbers of older adults in their communities.

RUSA’s Reference Guidelines on Library Services to Older Adults promotes library services to seniors.

Guidelines for Library Services to Persons with Dementia was created by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to address the needs of people with dementia through a global lens.

RAILS Serving Patrons with Dementia Group began as an Illinois group with librarians, managers, and support staff to meet the unique needs of serving the caregivers and those suffering with dementia and Alzheimer’s. This group is dedicated to bringing together services and information to better serve this population. They meet regularly to share programming and collection development ideas, marketing tips, and ways to partner with community organizations.