During my recent home visit to Mr. Dsouza (name changed) who is living with Alzheimer’s disease, I noticed a bottle of floor cleaner kept on his dining table. Usually this isn’t matter of concern, however in Mr.Dsouza’s case, he is physically able, can move around but can’t read without his glasses and is in mid stage of dementia has poor judgement and struggles with decision making .He could mistake the floor cleaner for a beverage as it kept on dining table.

There can be many instances where people with dementia can be at risk. The disease does not only affect cognition, it also affects perception of place, position ,slows timing and reflexes ,worsens co-ordination, and limits the abilities to plan ahead and solve problems. Once diagnosed with dementia, for his/her own safety person needs to discontinue driving, travelling alone, cooking, and handling bank transactions.

Safety at Home

Over time as the disease progresses the person with Dementia becomes less capable of managing things independently. It becomes the carer’s responsibility to ascertain the safety of the individual. It is important that person is offered safe environment that facilitates independence, still provides a life with sense of purpose, quality..  Person with dementia may be disoriented in new a house such as relative’s home, or even their newly renovated own house. They might struggle to locate bathroom doors in dark during night or many times in the morning as well right after waking up. At home one can take up following measures

* Removing hazardous items such knife, scissors, stove etc. out of reach
* Locking the doors to ensure the person does not wander out of the house
* Keeping the house free of clutter to facilitate unhindered movement
* Providing grab bars in the bathroom and corridors to help easy movement
* Providing adequate lighting
* Putting warning signs on harmful areas or objects

Medication

Medicines as per the prescription need to be taken by person with dementia. Medications should always be kept away from person and should be given as per prescription by family members/caregivers. Medicines boxes with day wise sorting should be avoided as person might be confused with today’s day, time of the day which may lead to either skipping the dose or overconsumption of medicine which can have serious consequences.

Outside home

Person should always be accompanied while going out of house. It is favourable that they are given a mobile phone that is easy to operate, however mobile phones can be misplaced or can be confusing to use in panic situations. It is also useful to keep id card, address in person’s wallet/purse,incase they forget the way back home.A steel bracelet with engraved name and address can be worn by person.

**Handling of Money,valuables**

Large sum of money, valuables should not be kept with person, as they misplace them or strangers may take unnecessary advantage of their memory loss. One of my service user with dementia routinely went to his bank, withdrew large sum of money from bank and when retuned home had no money in hand, he could not recall where the money went even when bank was only at short distance from home.

Ideally bank related transactions ,bill payments should be avoided by person with dementia,as they may find these tasks confusing. They may fail to understand what needs to be paid, overpay for some things, or leave money unaccounted for. A joint accountee or power of attorney should be added to handle necessary bank transactions for person with dementia.

**Keeping safe Vs.Quality of life**

In any stage of dementia the aim is to keep the person with dementia as active as possible, which includes activities related to their occupation/work, social engagements, physical activities like walking, exercises, yoga etc. However many times due to safety concerns people with dementia are deprived of many activities like someone who enjoyed cooking is recommended to not handle knives, gas stoves, or someone who enjoyed going out is now not allowed to go for a walk in a garden as they struggle to cross the road, might forget the way back home.

While setting up safety measures for person with dementia, it is important to remember that many times we tend to focus on disease –dementia so much that the setting up of care increasingly involves around risk management, keeping person safe this could predominately interfere with person’s independence, quality of life which requires social, therapeutic activities. As anyone of us enjoy, decide how to live our lives, a person living with dementia is no different and deserves the same respect.

Trained, empathetic caregivers will understand needs of person with dementia and are able to provide safe yet stimulating environment, activities for people with dementia. As we are seeing increased rate of dementia, we need to create dementia friendly communities, so that people affected by dementia feel understood and included, and that they can confidently contribute to community life.

Remember, it is crucial to help person experiencing dementia to maintain control over as many areas of their life as possible and encouraging them to maximise their remaining abilities.

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