

Brain and Behaviour in Dementia:

Limbic System

Transcript

Female presenter:

Finally, we'd like to tell you briefly about the limbic system, which is a collection of small parts of the brain, below the frontal, temporal and parietal lobes which help form emotions. The limbic system is connected to all parts of the brain that we have discussed so far, and if there's damage in this area, then people can become anxious, depressed or even paranoid. For example, if someone puts an item in a safe place, and then loses it because their memory has been affected by damage to the temporal lobes, then the damage to the limbic system means that if they can't find it, they'll put a paranoid interpretation on it and accuse somebody of having stolen it.

Carer 2:

When he's looking for something, he thinks that it's been stolen. He'll say somebody's come in the house and ... he doesn't necessarily ... I'll say to him, 'what is it you're looking for?' and he doesn't remember but he thinks that it's been stolen and his latest is thinking that some ... somebody's stolen part of our garden, you know, he thinks that the neighbours have encroached into the garden and it's really hard to explain that they haven't. I've even taken him out into the garden and shown him the boundaries and said that, you know ... but he doesn't have any power of reasoning now so I tend to try and change the subject.

Carer 3:

Does he hallucinate? He hallucinates all the time. I forget about it, I just take it as the course now because at first he used to get very upset about it and now I just go along with him. He'll say, 'There's six people in there. They're in my bed.' You know, and he gets really upset about it and I've got to go in and reassure him there's no one there and then he'll say, 'Oh well, they were there.' And he hallucinates quite a lot. I've just got used to it over the years. But he's always saying there's somebody there, you know, 'come and see this', you know, so I've just got used to that and cope with it better now than I used to in the beginning.

Male presenter:

The different causes of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease, vascular disease, Lewy Body or Pick's disease, affect different parts of the brain at different times and so cause different symptoms as the illness progresses. These illnesses cause disabilities rather like any other serious illness, only in the brain rather than in the body.

Female presenter:

We've shown you what happens when different parts of the brain are affected by dementia and many of the examples we've given may be familiar to you. Hopefully, understanding the relationship between the damage to the brain and the everyday behaviours that you see will be helpful to you.

Male presenter:

What may also be helpful to understand is that when parts of the brain are damaged, abilities are lost and generally cannot be regained. By trying to encourage, explain or teach these again, or by expecting too much of the sufferer, you're likely to be continually frustrated. Gradually, we have to adjust our expectations and come to terms with these losses. This is rather like trying to come to terms with any other serious disability, for instance severe arthritis. Even though the sufferer may look entirely well, we know they will be limited in what they can do by the arthritis and we would adjust our expectations accordingly.

Female presenter:

This doesn't mean, however, that you shouldn't encourage the person to make full use of their remaining abilities. It's really important for their sense of self worth that they're able to do as much as they still possibly can. What we do know is that activity is an important part of keeping us all well, and this includes people with memory problems. This might involve helping out around the house or garden, going shopping with you, or sharing a walk, a drive or a cuddle. Remember, every bit, even every little bit, really does help.