

GUIDELINES FOR THE EVALUATION OF DEMENTIA AND AGE RELATED COGNITIVE DECLINE

1. Be familiar with the prevailing diagnostic nomenclature and specific diagnostic criteria.
2. Attempt to obtain informed consent. If not possible from the client obtain from the family or legal guardian. Limits to confidentiality occur when potential harm to patients is possible.
3. Gain the specialized competence required for such evaluations. Stay abreast of current scientific knowledge and developments so that selecting appropriate data collection methods will be utilized.
4. Seek and provide appropriate consultation. Communication of findings with primary care physicians and/or other referring physicians with sensitivity to informed consent is mandatory. In allegations of abuse, neglect, family violence as well as possible legal competence or guardianship seek consultation if necessary.
5. Be aware of personal and societal biases and engage in nondiscriminatory practice. If unable to do so then withdraw from the evaluation process.
6. Conduct a clinical interview as part of the evaluation. Be alert to discordance between self and family reports and test data. Take a careful history particularly regarding the time of onset and nature and rate of the course of the difficulties to assist with differential diagnosis.
7. Standardized psychological and neuropsychological tests may represent the most unique contribution psychologists can make to this process. The tests should be standardized, reliable, valid and have normative data directly referable to older populations.
8. Attempt to estimate the premorbid ability. This can be done through socio-economic status, educational level, occupational history and client and family report. Once tested this can serve as a baseline from which to measure future changes in cognitive functioning with a one year interval often adequate for retesting.
9. Be sensitive to the limitations and sources of variability and error in psychometric performance. Practice effects can result so the use of alternate test forms is advisable when available.
10. Provide constructive feedback, support and education as well as maintaining a therapeutic alliance not only with the client but family members who may be caretakers. Educate yourself about approved treatments and recommend them when appropriate.

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