

UTIs and Alzheimer's

When caregivers and families go to the Alzheimer's Association website and sign up on the message boards, <http://www.alzconnected.org/discussion.aspx>, searching the Caregivers Forum with key words will pull about 30,000 posts containing the word "Alzheimer's", 14,000 that include the word "brain" and 10,000 that contain the word "neurologist." No big surprises there, but here is the one that may surprise the newer caregivers: If you type in "UTI", you will pull over 8,000 posts.

UTIs, or urinary tract infections, can cause changes in someone with Alzheimer's disease that you might never expect. The impact can be very profound. Some of the titles of the message board threads in which UTIs are mentioned tell the story, including "Sudden decline," "Yelling out" and "Manic episodes... WOW!"

Here is a sampling of some of the posts on the topic:

- "For my mom, falling and hallucinations always mean check for a UTI", posted one caregiver on the website.
- Another said, "With my aunt, I could always diagnose a UTI...for example, when she picked up a glass of water and threw the water over her shoulder, I called it right away —UTI."

Our compromised elders, especially females often develop, "silent" urinary tract infections. These UTIs are called "silent" because they usually have no symptoms of pain, no burning, no odor, no issues with frequency, etc. But there will often be profound changes in behaviors.

When UTIs are wreaking havoc with the family members of Alzheimer's caregivers, threads will be seen on message boards in which the caregivers are in a state of panic about the symptoms that are showing up. And for good reason — the symptoms are powerful and can actually mimic end of life symptoms for some people. These caregivers are used to a slow disease progression, and the UTI with no overt symptoms can make everyone involved act in ways that reflect their feeling that this situation is a life-threatening emergency. While the UTI does need to be treated right away, this diagnosis is a relief for the patient and the family. UTIs do not cause permanent damage, and they respond quickly and successfully to treatment. And best of all, once the infection clears, the person returns back to their condition prior to the UTI.

That's when the message board posts show caregivers breathing a deep sigh of relief and thanking their peers in the online community for their caring support — and for tipping them off to one of the oddest but most treatable components of Alzheimer's disease.

Learn more at: <http://www.alzconnected.org/discussion.aspx>

We Can Help

The Alzheimer's Association Area Chapter serves 80 counties of Nebraska and all of Wyoming with their administrative office located in Lincoln, Nebraska. For information about the Alzheimer's Association call (402) 420-2540, visit www.alz.org or call our 24/7 Helpline: (800) 272-3900.