ANXIETY & COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Dr. Sherri Hayden, Ph.D., R. Psych.

Neuropsychologist, UBC Hospital
Clinic for Alzheimer Disease & Related Disorders

Clinical Assistant Professor,
UBC Department of Medicine, Division of Neurology

Adjunct Faculty,
SFU Department of Gerontology
DEFINITIONS:

• COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT
  • Deficits in areas such as memory, attention, language, visual-spatial skills, planning, judgement etc.

• ANXIETY
  • Worry, preoccupation or apprehension
  • This worry feels difficult to control
  • Causes significant distress or impedes functional abilities
ANXIETY DISORDERS:
ANXIETY IN LATER LIFE

- Anxiety in prodromal and early stages of dementia is under-recognized and under-treated.

- Anxiety is known to be prevalent in aging populations
  - Anxiety Disorders = 4-15%;
  - Sub-clinical Anxiety symptoms = 15-20%

- Approximately 30% of individuals with some forms of Anxiety Disorder (i.e., GAD-most common in aging pop.) have associated cognitive impairment
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RISING ANXIETY

- Boomer’s proactive approach to health
- Increased info in media & internet
- Introduction of new labels (MCI) & treatments
IMPACT OF ANXIETY IN OUR CLINIC POPULATION

- Increased usage of clinic/hospital/health care resources
- Increased functional and cognitive disability
- Increased possibility of inappropriate resource use
RISK FACTORS FOR ANXIETY IN OUR CLINIC POPULATION

**BIOLOGICAL**

- Genetics
- Chronic Health Issues
- Substance abuse
- Female Gender

**PSYCHOLOGICAL**

- Personality (i.e., high IQ and/or achievement, perfectionism, obsessiveness)
- Stressful life events
- Direct experience with dementia
FORMS OF ANXIETY IN OUR CLINIC

In our increasingly complex population, it is challenging to differentiate between:

- **REACTIVE ANXIETY**- worry in response to the consequence of measurable cognitive deficit/or emerging dementia

- **PRIMARY ANXIETY**- anxiety that seems to be causally related to cognitive deficit (i.e., without emerging dementia)
ANXIETY & COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

- There is an interdependent relationship between anxiety, cognitive impairment and function in daily life.

- Anxiety in later life is correlated with some degree of cognitive impairment (Beaudreau & O’Hara, 2008).
ANXIETY-COGNITION SPECTRUM

Cognitive Performance

Low
Anxiety/Arousal

Optimal Range Of Cognitive Function

Apathy
Low Effort
Poorer Performance

Hypervigilant
High Effort
Poorer Performance

High

Yerkes Dobson Principal
UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY IN DEMENTIA

• Some studies suggest anxiety is a risk factor for conversion to dementia. This seems most consistent with a REACTIVE ANXIETY group.

• Other studies have not replicated this finding, suggesting a possible PRIMARY ANXIETY group contained within the prodromal and early dementia populations (i.e., Mild Cognitive Impairment etc.).

• Assessment & treatment protocols, as well as health care resource requirements for these two anxiety subgroups may prove to be very different.
DEVELOPING RESOURCES

• Improved & co-existing screening measures for *both* cognitive and anxiety/mood issues within clinical populations such as ours

• Introduction or improvement of resources for our population to include specific education & treatment for both primary & reactive anxiety

• Inclusion of such resources in diagnostic clinics, such as ours, to ensure the earliest intervention
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Longitudinal studies to determine markers for reactive versus primary anxiety in MCI groups, which may require development of more specific & sensitive measurement tools

- Studies focused upon specifying the nature and cognitive impact of varying degrees & sub-types of anxiety prevalent in aging and dementia populations

- Intervention studies to determine the impact of psychotherapeutic treatments (i.e., CBT based) on various forms of anxiety in the our population
OUR KNOWLEDGE OF DEMENTIA

"Since the universe is rapidly expanding, there's a lot more that we have to worry about now,"
RESOURCES FOR ANXIETY:

- www.anxietybc.com (anxiety resources in bc)
- www.heretohelp.bc.ca (seniors mental health issues)
- www.cmha.bc.ca (seniors mental health resources)