

R. WILSON, E. ROCHON, A. MIHAELIDIS. *Examining effective communications strategies employed by caregivers assisting individuals with Alzheimer's disease during oral care.* Gerontechnology 2010;9(2):339; doi:10.4017/gt.2010.09.02.190.00. **Purpose** Individuals with moderate-severe dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease (AD), are afflicted with cognitive and functional declines that make it increasingly difficult to complete basic activities of daily living (ADLs). Communication declines associated with AD and the inability to complete sequential steps of a task from memory creates the need for caregiver assistance. Managing the completion of ADLs can be a demanding and frustrating experience for caregivers and care recipients, in part because of the need to provide constant reminders in the form of communication prompts. Communication breakdowns and time spent on functional activities are major contributors to caregiver burden and stressed caregiver-AD relationships<sup>1-3</sup>. Currently, clinically recommended communication strategies are available to caregivers, but are based on clinical intuition and not on empirical research<sup>4</sup>. Investigation into the communication strategies actually used by formal caregivers (i.e., nurse) that contribute to successful ADL completion has not been conducted; therefore, to date, there are no clear, empirically supported communication guidelines available to formal caregivers during the completion of daily tasks. There is a need for the development of such guidelines, as evidence-based strategy recommendations will assist in the reduction of caregiver burden, in the increase of positive interactions between caregivers and individuals with AD, and in the improved quality of life for individuals with AD and their caregivers. Furthermore, identification of effective communication strategies is paramount in the development of caregiving technologies. More specifically, evidence-based communication guidelines is an essential component needed to help inform the development of a new intelligent computerized prompting system designed to assist individuals with AD during the completion ADLs<sup>5</sup>. This systematic observational study is designed to examine and describe the communication strategies (i.e., verbal and non-verbal) used by formal caregivers assisting residents with AD during the completion of a basic ADL task, specifically, toothbrushing and to help inform the development of a new intelligent computerized prompting system. **Method** We will recruit sixteen formal caregivers and sixteen moderate-severe AD residents from a community based long-term care facility. Each caregiver will be randomly assigned an individual with AD and each caregiver-AD dyad will be observed during the completion of six separate toothbrushing sessions, for a total of 96 toothbrushing trials. The caregivers will be instructed to provide any assistance necessary to help the individual with AD to complete the task without actually completing the task for the afflicted individual. Each toothbrushing session will be transcribed into a language analysis software program (SALT) and each transcript will be coded for the presence of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies. Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the frequency of communication behaviours and correlation analysis will be used to examine relationships in the data. **Results & Discussion** We are currently in the early stages of this study. The University of Toronto has recently approved ethics and we are in the stage of participant recruitment.

## References

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