HSP 440

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IDAG 1

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# Alzheimer's Association

As of October 8, going on two weeks, I have been receiving the standard staff training which includes watching introductory videos about Alzheimer's disease (AD) and its impact on the person with dementia (PWD) as well as the consequences to their families and/or caregivers. Other videos focus on the specific role of the care consultant (CC) and the appropriate way to address caregivers' concerns and challenges. One of the ethical dilemmas that caught my attention was tube feeding versus assisted oral feeding in the final stages of AD.

I approached my field supervisor, Janet, about this dilemma and she directed me to the online literature that explains both approaches. In assisted oral feeding, a caregiver provides food and water to the PWDs when they are unable to eat on their own. The PWD has the choice of eating or refusing the food. Tube feeding involves a tube that passes through the skin of the abdomen and directly to the stomach; however, there is risk of infection and a risk that the PWD could dislodge the tube during a crisis. Tube feeding has no nutritional advantages and lacks the human interaction that assisted feeding can provide (Alzheimer's Association, 2011). Caregivers and family members often call asking for direction and recommendations about this. It is important to offer these people as much information as possible, both in favor or against these practices and let them decide what is best for their loved ones. The care consultants cannot side with either method. This is where plans and advanced directives relieve the stress and worry of the caregiver and the family. It is important to consider the PWD's wishes while he or she can still articulate them.

One important lesson for me is to keep in mind that the number one goal in any interaction is to have the client, in this case the person with dementia, retain his or her autonomy. Advising the family to talk with loved ones about their wishes in advance is the right thing to do, and it is best to have the PWDs speak on tape or write their wishes down. I am also aware of the importance of reading and researching as much as I can about Alzheimer's and other types of dementia. This way I can be prepared to educate people and present them with options.

# Reference

Alzheimer's.org (n.d.). *Alzheimer's and dementia caregiver center: Ethical and care issues*. Retrieved from http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-ethical-issues.asp