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Hearing loss as a cause of dementia

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A major study in effect since 1991 has found that up to two thirds of diagnoses of Alzheimer disease are incorrect. The potential effect of hearing loss on cognition is suggested by studies demonstrating that, when auditory perception is difficult, greater effort is dedicated to auditory perceptual processing to the detriment of other processes such as working memory. Individuals with significant sensorineural hearing loss frequently display behaviors that mimic Alzheimer disease and are, as a result, misdiagnosed. They may be given a drug such as donepezil which is contraindicated because they already have adequate acetylcholine and as a result experience the following: subdued or depressed mood, difficulty concentrating, difficulty with complex thought processes, mental confusion, memory problems and more. In order to reduce or eliminate misdiagnosis in hearing impaired elderly, audiological assessment is mandatory. If hearing is even mildly impaired, the use of some type of personal amplifier is required. These devices are not hearing aids and are not intended to replace hearing aids but to be used in specific circumstances in a one-to-one setting such as medical examination. Reliance on accurate hearing of the questions posed is, obviously, mandatory for all physicians in all circumstances when interacting with patients but especially when assessing for dementias. The objective is to increase awareness of both the influence of hearing impairment on accuracy of diagnosis and the features of hearing loss that can contribute to cognitive impairment in the older person. The accompanying video illustrates a personal amplifier in use and the remarkable change that occurs in a severely hearing impaired gentleman who normally wears hearing aids. He describes his experiences.

Biography

Campbell-Taylor is a Clinical Neuroscientist with over twenty-five years of experience assessing and treating persons with many different types of neurological disorder including common and very rare dementias. She has published widely in a variety of peer reviewed journals. She is in private practice as a medical consultant.

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