Case Vignettes of Hospitalized Older Adults © *

Please read the following five scenarios about patients in the hospital. In each story, the older adult has been hospitalized for a medical reason. After reading the scenario, please answer each of the questions that follow.

The Case of Al
Al is a 76-year-old male, who has been in the hospital for one day. Al has not had any unusual behaviors, but his family reports that slowly over the course of the past year, he has been getting gradually more forgetful. Al has more trouble dressing than he did last year. Al seems to have more trouble finding the right words to say than he did a year ago. Al gets confused more often than last year about where he is going. None of these changes happened all at once, but Al seems to be slowly getting more confused in his memory and thinking. Vital signs, physical examination and ECG have been normal, and all lab values were within normal limits.

1. Please rate the patient’s mental status as:
   A. Not confused □
   B. Somewhat confused □
   C. Very confused □
   D. Uncertain of mental status □

2. Do you think this patient has experienced an acute change in mental status (yes or no)?
   Yes □ No □

3. Please choose ONE ANSWER from the choices below regarding what you think is happening to this patient
   A. Dementia □
   B. Delirium □
   C. Delirium Superimposed on Dementia □
   D. Normal aging □
   E. None of the above □

4. Have you ever had this happen before with patients that you have cared for?
   Yes □ No □

5. What, if anything, do you think may be causing it?

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________________________________________________________________________
6. What, if anything, do you think you need to do about the problem?

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7a. Would you call the on-call physician for this patient?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7b. If yes, why? ____________________________

8. Would you consider calling the on-call physician to medicate this patient, and if so with what medication?

Yes ☐ medication: ____________________________ No ☐

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this case?

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The Case of Betty
Betty is an 80-year-old female who has been the hospital for two days. Betty has been doing fine, and has no memory complaints. One morning, Betty does not want to get out of bed. Betty does not seem to be interested in food and seems very slowed down. She appears sleepier than usual, and is disoriented to time, place, and mistakes her nurse for one of her relatives. Betty does not seem to be paying much attention when you talk to her. Over the next few days, Betty spends a lot of time just lying in bed and staring into space. According to the family, she did not have a history of depression, sadness, or feeling blue.

1. Please rate the patient’s mental status as:
   A. Not confused
   B. Somewhat confused
   C. Very confused
   D. Uncertain of mental status

2. Do you think this patient has experienced an acute change in mental status (yes or no)?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Please choose ONE ANSWER from the choices below regarding what you think is happening to this patient
   A. Dementia
   B. Delirium
   C. Delirium Superimposed on Dementia
   D. Normal aging
   E. None of the above

4. Have you ever had this happen before with patients that you have cared for?
   Yes ☐ No ☐
5. What, if anything, do you think may be causing it?

6. What, if anything, do you think you need to do about the problem?

7a. Would you call the on-call physician for this patient?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7b. If yes, why? ____________________________

8. Would you consider calling the on-call physician to medicate this patient, and if so with what medication?

Yes ☐ medication: ____________________________ No ☐

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this case?

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The Case of Donald

Donald is a 69-year-old male who was admitted to the hospital this morning. Donald has been doing fine, with only mild forgetfulness but no obvious memory issues. Suddenly at midnight, Donald walks down the hall towards the nursing station looking for his father, who you know passed away many years ago. When you remind him of this, Donald says he just saw his father walk past his room, and insists on finding him. When directed to go back to bed, Donald becomes angry, and accuses you of stealing from him and kidnapping his father and demands that you take him to his father. Donald is up all night, out of bed pacing and searching through everything in his room. Over the next few days, Donald still has trouble sleeping. He seems much more distracted and forgetful than he did on admission. When sitting up in a chair he is pulling off his dressings and asking to leave the hospital. Donald says he sees people who died years ago. He is reaching out at the air as if he sees something. When you try to reassure Donald, he tries to hit you.

1. Please rate the patient's mental status as:
   A. Not confused ☐
   B. Somewhat confused ☐
   C. Very confused ☐
   D. Uncertain of mental status ☐

2. Do you think this patient has experienced an acute change in mental status (yes or no)?
   Yes ☐  No ☐

3. Please choose ONE ANSWER from the choices below regarding what you think is happening to this patient
   A. Dementia ☐
   B. Delirium ☐
   C. Delirium Superimposed on Dementia ☐
   D. Normal aging ☐
   E. None of the above ☐

4. Have you ever had this happen before with patients that you have cared for?
   Yes ☐  No ☐
5. What, if anything, do you think may be causing it?

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6. What, if anything, do you think you need to do about the problem?
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7a. Would you call the on-call physician for this patient?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7b. If yes, why? __________________________

8. Would you consider calling the on-call physician to medicate this patient, and if so with what medication?

Yes ☐ medication: __________________________ No ☐

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this case?

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The Case of Diane
Diane is an 83-year-old female who has been in the hospital one day. According to her family, Diane has had increasing memory problems over the past year, and problems getting lost while driving to a local restaurant where she has been many times. She has more difficulty finding the right name for things. She has also experienced increased difficulty in completing daily ADL’s. In the morning, you go in to check her vital signs and suddenly she is more confused. She tells you to stay away and tries to punch you. This is not her usual behavior at home. She accuses you of trying to kill her and steal her belongings. She is disoriented to time and place, and does not recognize you as her nurse. You leave the room, and you hear her talking to herself and moving things around in the room. You return to check on her and find that she has pulled out her IV.

1. Please rate the patient’s mental status as:
   A. Not confused
   B. Somewhat confused
   C. Very confused
   D. Uncertain of mental status

2. Do you think this patient has experienced an acute change in mental status (yes or no)?
   Yes ☐  No ☐

3. Please choose ONE ANSWER from the choices below regarding what you think is happening to this patient
   A. Dementia
   B. Delirium
   C. Delirium Superimposed on Dementia
   D. Normal aging
   E. None of the above

4. Have you ever had this happen before with patients that you have cared for?
   Yes ☐  No ☐
5. What, if anything, do you think may be causing it?

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6. What, if anything, do you think you need to do about the problem?

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7a. Would you call the on-call physician for this patient?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

7b. If yes, why? ________________________________

8. Would you consider calling the on-call physician to medicate this patient, and if so with what medication?

Yes [ ] medication: ____________________________ No [ ]

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this case?

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**The Case of Carol**

Carol is a 74-year-old female who has been in the hospital three days. According to her family, she has had increasing memory problems over the past year, and problems getting lost while driving to many familiar places where she has driven numerous times. She has also experienced increased difficulty in completing daily ADL's. The family reports, she does not have a history of depression, sadness, or feeling blue. Carol does not seem to notice when you talk to her and is much sleepier than before, and falls asleep while you try to assess her. She is disoriented to time and place, and does not recognize you at all. She will not eat or take her medicines. The next morning, Carol will not get out of bed. She is awake, although somnolent, and is staring blankly at the wall. She will not eat, nor show any interest in her food. When you attempt to assess her status, you notice that she is once again sleepier than usual, and she will not remain awake when you are taking her vital signs.

1. **Please rate the patient's mental status as:**
   - A. Not confused
   - B. Somewhat confused
   - C. Very confused
   - D. Uncertain of mental status

2. **Do you think this patient has experienced an acute change in mental status (yes or no)?**
   - Yes  
   - No

3. **Please choose **ONE ANSWER** from the choices below regarding what you think is happening to this patient**
   - A. Dementia
   - B. Delirium
   - C. Delirium Superimposed on Dementia
   - D. Normal aging
   - E. None of the above

4. **Have you ever had this happen before with patients that you have cared for?**
   - Yes  
   - No
5. What, if anything, do you think may be causing it?

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6. What, if anything, do you think you need to do about the problem?

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7a. Would you call the on-call physician for this patient?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7b. If yes, why? ________________________________

8. Would you consider calling the on-call physician to medicate this patient, and if so with what medication?

Yes ☐ medication: ________________________________ No ☐

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this case?

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Thank you for your interest in this topic. Author of the vignettes Donna Fick, RN, PhD may be reached via email at dmf21@psu.edu
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