

[OPINION] Educating families for a better dementia quality of life

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Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of Dementia in older adults. - UNSPLASH

AS of 2025, Malaysia's population is roughly 34 million, with about 2.6 million individuals aged 65 and above. The proportion is 7.7% of the national population.

This consistent upward trend in aging demographics happens due to longer declination of birth rates, life expectancy, better healthcare and improved living standards.

With the growth of Malaysia's senior population, the challenges they endure, especially health concerns like dementia, are becoming more pronounced. It is increasingly prevalent, affecting memory, cognitive abilities, and daily performance among this group.

The report from Ministry of Health Malaysia (2023) estimates that there will be 260,000 dementia cases projected in our country by 2030.

Dementia generally refers to memory loss. It is one of the primal symptoms of the thence condition. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of Dementia in older adults. Somehow there are other causes of dementia too.

A study by Stockholm Regional Health Care Data (2023) listed that depression, brain age and chronic stress play the primary contributors to the global burden of dementia.

Besides that, inordinate sleepiness and comorbidities such as respiratory disorders, diabetes, cerebrovascular disorders and hypertension can impair the memory of the aged and lead to dementia disease.

Consequently, dementia will not only affect the patients but also caregivers especially the family members. They are easily burdened both emotionally and financially.

A positive aspect is that, although dementia cannot be cured, certain treatments can help slow its progression and improve patients' quality of life.

Studies suggest social support plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for dementia patients. Family members' engagement through social interactions and acquainted surrounding can slow the progression of Dementia.

Such effective social support systems can improve mental health, lessen stress for caregivers, and delay cognitive condition among the dementia patients.

Prior to this, the government has initiated some moves to provide care, aid and protection to the elderly including those with dementia and their family.

The Malaysian Department of Social Welfare for example is emphasizing the social support through family education that can improve the quality of life (QoL) for dementia patients and their caregivers/family members.

This family education puts forward some interventions that can resonate with the values and beliefs of the target population. Since dementia often causes disorientation, family members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with cultural symbols, language, and traditions that help elderly individuals connected to their past, reducing anxiety and confusion.

Studies propose that using storytelling and traditional folklore in reminiscence therapy enhances memory recall and emotional well-being among the elderly. Common cultural songs, rituals, and foods activate emotional and cognitive relation, fortify brain function, also do help in this issue.

Another element in family education is the social activities that can fight against loneliness and depression, which are risk factors for dementia. Elderly individuals engaging in group activities like community gatherings or religious ceremonies can reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

Such practices are believed can enhance treatment adherence and emotional relief ultimately improving the quality of life for dementia patients.

Integrating family education into the care of dementia patients requires significant involvement from family members. They can produce supportive environments that conserve self-esteem, improve mental engagement, and finally slow cognitive decline among the dementia patients.

Yet, the idea of involving the family education with dementia patients is still at initial stage. More studies and researches must be conducted to address the gaps in current practise and enhance its support systems.

As Malaysia is rich with the multicultural landscape, comprising diverse ethnic communities, dementia family education must be culturally tailored to provide effective social support that aligns with the unique needs of different groups.

By enhancing family education from various angles, Malaysia can create a more comprehensive and effective dementia care framework, finally improving the quality of life for both patients and caregivers.

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