

9. What are the most pertinent questions to ask family?

The importance of gathering collateral information as part of any cognitive assessment is well documented (Ayalon, 2011; Mackinnon & Mulligan, 1998). To fully evaluate a cognitively impaired client's occupational performance, obtaining information from proxies is a necessary part of an occupational therapy assessment (Hartman-Maeir, Katz & Baum, 2009). Family should be asked questions about changes from baseline cognition, the time frame around which these changes have occurred, and whether these changes were sudden, of gradual onset, or fluctuating in nature. These would include specific questions about memory and orientation (e.g. remembering appointments, remembering people, and recent and past events, becoming lost or disoriented in public places or while driving), learning new tasks, organizing and completing tasks that used to be done easily (e.g. planning and cooking meals; managing finances; using the telephone) and which are not a result of a loss of physical abilities. It would also be pertinent to ask questions about changes in mood, personality, and social engagement. All of this information forms an important part of the assessment.

There are standardized assessment tools which can also be used to gather this type of information. For example, the Informant Questionnaire on Cognitive Decline in the Elderly (IQCODE) is a screening tool that is often used to detect dementia and other cognitive deficits (Jorm, 2004). It uses information provided by an informant (e.g. a close relative) to assess a person's change in cognitive functioning over the previous ten years. It can be used when the person being assessed is not well educated, not fluent in the dominant language of the culture, or is not able or willing to participate in cognitive testing procedures.

References:

Ayalon, L. (2011). The IQCODE versus a single-item informant measure to discriminate between cognitively intact individuals and individuals with dementia or cognitive impairment. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology*, 24(3), 168-173.

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Jorm AF. (2004). The Informant Questionnaire on Cognitive Decline in the Elderly (IQCODE): a review. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 16(3), 275-93.

Mackinnon A., & Mulligan R. (1998). Combining cognitive testing and informant report to increase accuracy in screening for dementia. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 155, 1529-1535.

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