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Effect of Aromatherapy on Patients with Alzheimer's Disease

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Objective: Recently, the importance of non-pharmacological therapies for dementia has come to the fore. In the present study, we examined the curative effects of aromatherapy in dementia in 28 elderly people, 17 of whom had Alzheimer's disease (AD).

Methods: After a control period of 28 days, aromatherapy was performed over the following 28 days, with a wash out period of another 28 days. Aromatherapy consisted of the use of rosemary and lemon essential oils in the morning, and lavender and orange in the evening. To determine the effects of aromatherapy, patients were evaluated using the Japanese version of the Gottfries, Brane, Steen scale (GBSS-J), Functional Assessment Staging of Alzheimer's disease (FAST), a revised version of Hasegawa's Dementia Scale (HDS-R), and the Touch Panel-type Dementia Assessment Scale (TDAS) four times: before the control period, after the control period, after aromatherapy, and after the washout period.

Results: All patients showed significant improvement in personal orientation related to cognitive function on both the GBSS-J and TDAS after therapy. In particular, patients with AD showed significant improvement in total TDAS scores. Result of routine laboratory tests showed no significant changes, suggesting that there were no side-effects associated with the use of aromatherapy. Results from Zarit's score showed no significant changes, suggesting that caregivers had no effect on the improved patient scores seen in the other tests.

Conclusions: In conclusion, we found aromatherapy an efficacious nonpharmacological therapy for dementia. Aromatherapy may have some potential for improving cognitive function, especially in AD patients.