

SAMPLE Symposium Proposal

Title: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP OVER THE COURSE OF DEMENTIA

Overview:

The value of social relationships throughout the life course, no matter a person's abilities or limitations, is self-evident. Friendships have been linked to a psychological and emotional wellbeing and better physical functioning for older adults. Conversely, there are negative consequences (e.g., depression) associated with losing friendships and having ones' social networks decrease. The potential consequences of declining social engagement for people experiencing these life events makes friendship *formation* and social interactions of critical topics to study and understand. While a decline of cognitive ability is a potential limiting factor for the person with dementia to establish friendships, research on how friendships are navigated throughout the course of dementia is lacking. The question becomes, can the person with dementia prevent the sometimes-marked decrements in cognitive functioning from impeding their social functioning? Understanding how social functioning can be maintained by people with dementia would be invaluable information because of the potential to preserve high quality of life throughout the experience of this disorder. The papers within this symposium will discuss the social worlds of people with dementia in different contexts. The objective of this symposium is to present information concerning how socialization changes or stays the same over the course of dementia and how specific factors influence the social environment (e.g., language, use of art, living arrangements, previous social networks, retention of similar values, ability to look beyond the disease, flexibility, recognition of personal strengths, a sense of humor, and a trusting relationship). Practice implications will be discussed.

Presenters (in order):

- 1) Sam Ponders, PhD, (Neurology Dept, GUSOM) describes the friendship study which examines ethnographic data of social relationships among persons with a range of dementia symptoms living in long-term care. Her paper will focus on language resources used to create and maintain social relationships.
- 2) Jane Doe, PhD (Sociology Dept, John Carroll University) examines semi-structured interview data conducted with persons with mild to moderate dementia to show factors that underlie the maintenance of friendships: retention of similar values, ability to look beyond the disease, flexibility, recognition of personal strengths, a sense of humor, and a trusting relationship.
- 3) Fran Majors, PhD (Gerontology Dept, Miami University) will describe results from Friendship Study.
- 4) John Casey, PhD (Psychology Dept, X University) will describe research on persons with dementia and their capacity for sustained relationships.