Algorithm Guiding the Differential Diagnosis of Dementia

Memory complaint or other decline in cognitive function

History
Functional evaluation
Psychiatric assessment
Mental status exam
Neurological/physical exam
Caregiver assessment

Meets criteria for dementia? — **No** → Non-dementia memory disturbances including age-related changes, delirium, amnesia, memory complaints with depression

Yes

Cause of dementia apparent? — **Yes** → Patients with a history of trauma, anoxic insult or other definite cause of their dementia (e.g., Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease), if stable, require no further diagnostic assessment

No

Laboratory tests abnormal; medical illness present? — **Yes** → Specific diagnosis: hypothyroidism, B12 deficiency, syphilis, systematic illness, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) encephalopathy, etc.

No

Neuroimaging indicated and abnormal? — **Yes** → Tumor, abscess, hydrocephalus, subdural hematoma, multiple sclerosis, stroke/vascular dementia

No

Motor system disorder present? — **Yes** → Extrapyramidal syndromes: progressive supranuclear palsy, Lewy body dementia, other movement disorders with dementia
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease

No

Evidence of depression syndrome present? — **Yes** → Dementia syndrome of depression

No

Alzheimer's disease	Memory, language and visuospatial disturbances; indifference, delusions, agitation
Frontotemporal dementia	Marked personality changes; relative preservation of visuospatial skills; executive dysfunction
Lewy body dementia	Marked visual hallucinations, delusions, fluctuating mental status, neuroleptic sensitivity

Source: Diagnosis, Management & Treatment of Dementia: A Practical Guide for Primary Care Physicians. AMA, 1999.