



Dementia: An introductory guide for care home staff

Two thirds of older people living in care homes are likely to have dementia yet many care home staff know little about dementia and how it affects people.

This can lead to major problems when trying to provide care and support.

There is a lot of good information available. The purpose of this introductory guide is to give care staff some basic information and to point people in the direction of further advice.

Dementia: Some basic facts

- Dementia is an age related condition. The older you are the more likely you are to have dementia.
- 1 in 16 of people over 65 have dementia, 1 in 4 over 85.
- Two thirds of people living in care homes are likely to have dementia. Around 40% will be in ordinary care homes which do not have a specialist dementia registration.
- Almost half of the people with dementia living in care homes will have moderate to severe dementia.

More about dementia

Dementia is damage to the brain which occurs when people get older. Not everyone is affected. A small number of people are affected when they are younger. Dementia is not to be confused with mental illness.

There are two main types: Alzheimers disease and Vascular dementia. The damage increases over time so the effects become more severe.

Dementia affects people in very different ways depending on the area of brain damaged, the person's personality, their background and their physical health

Most people with dementia will experience:

- loss of short term, recent memory
- problems in perception and understanding, and
- problems in expressing themselves.

Some people with dementia may also experience:

- hallucinations
- problems in controlling bodily functions (e.g. in standing, continence), and
- find it hard to sequence activities.

Dementia can result in people relying on their long-term memory to make sense of what is happening around them. This leads to them mistaking things and to misunderstandings. For example, they may go into the office in a care home thinking they are at work, or believing a visitor is their mother who has come to collect them from school.

It can be distressing and frightening to be so confused. Like anyone faced with such situations, people with dementia may respond by becoming anxious, withdrawn, frustrated or angry.

It can be hard to tell if someone has dementia. **Only 1 in 3 people are ever diagnosed.** But if things aren't "ringing right" consider dementia as a possible reason.

Supporting people with dementia to have a good life

Caring for people with dementia is demanding. However it can also be very uplifting and rewarding. There are real opportunities to have fun, to be close to people with dementia and to help them to live well.

It is important that you have a positive attitude. You should expect people with dementia to continue to have a life. You should be proud of and respected for the work that you do.

Top tips

1. In approaching someone with dementia it is critical to try and put yourself into their shoes.
2. Find out about the person's background, where they are from, their interests and work history. Make sure you use their preferred name.
3. Help people to be involved in activities that interest them.
4. Recognise that difficult behaviour is often only a means of communicating anxiety, confusion and distress. Seek to understand the underlying problems.
5. Pay very close attention to non-verbal communication. Careful observation can provide valuable insight into people's needs.
6. When talking to a person with dementia minimise background noise, keep your sentences short. Give the person time to absorb what you are saying and be patient when they reply.
7. When a person with dementia believes they are right acknowledge their feelings, don't confront their reality, and help them move on to other thoughts.
8. Welcome, support and involve relatives and friends.
9. Work as a team: support each other and share ideas. Have fun.
10. Every contact with a person with dementia is a golden opportunity to make their day. A smile and a squeeze of the hand goes a long way.

Dementia training

This leaflet not a replacement for dementia training. It is important that staff put themselves forward for training in dementia and are given opportunities to learn about best practice.

Every care home should have someone who has a special interest in dementia and who should provide advice and support to other staff. Find out who the person is in your home and find out how they can help you.

Where to find out more

The **Dementia Gateway** www.scie.org.uk/publications/dementia/ produced by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) offers high quality information, video and training programmes. There is in depth advice about establishing communication and managing difficult situations.

The **Alzheimer's Society** (www.alzheimers.org.uk, Tel: 020 742 3500) offers a wide range of fact sheets, studies, discussion forums, advice and sources of support.

The **Dementia Information Portal** www.dementia.dh.gov.uk is a Department of Health website, which follows the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy. It offers information to anyone with an interest in improving services for people with dementia.

✓ **Remember you can access the Internet for free at local libraries**

Living well with dementia across the South West

www.southwestdementiapartnership.org.uk