

Dementia Practice Guidance

Using this guidance

This guidance has been written by tri.x to support practitioners to understand the needs of people with Dementia, and think about some of the ways that they may need to adapt their practice to maximise their involvement in care and support processes.

It should be used as supplementary guidance to available procedures, and all statutory requirements of the Care Act 2014 apply.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a complex syndrome (a group of related symptoms) associated with an ongoing decline of the brain and its abilities, which diminishes the ability of the person to do everyday tasks over time.

Common symptoms of most Dementia include;

- a) Loss of memory;
- b) Difficulty in understanding people and finding the right words;
- c) Difficulty in completing simple tasks and solving minor problems; and
- d) Mood changes and difficulties managing emotional responses.

Symptoms typically worsen as the condition progresses to more areas of the brain, and in later stages of Dementia a person may experience significant difficulties with all bodily functions including mobility, swallowing, continence and speech.

There are different types of Dementia that can be diagnosed, depending on the cause. The most common are;

- a) Alzheimers Disease;
- b) Vascular Dementia;
- c) Dementia with Lewy Bodies; and
- d) Frontotemporal Dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is thought to affect around 520,000 people in the UK. During the course of the disease, the chemistry and structure of the brain changes gradually over time, leading to the death of more and more brain cells. Associated symptoms get progressively worse. There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease although symptoms in the earlier stages can sometimes be managed with medication to delay the progression of the condition.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular Dementia is the second most common type of Dementia with around 150,000 people affected. Vascular Dementia occurs when the brain cells die because they have been starved of oxygen. This can be following a Stroke but can also be caused by a blood clot or a disease of the blood vessels in the brain. Unlike Alzheimer's Disease, Vascular Dementia symptoms suddenly worsen each time the brain is starved of oxygen and, depending on the area of the brain affected the symptoms can be localised to the functions that particular area of the brain controls.

Dementia with Lewy Bodies

Lewy Bodies are small deposits of protein that appear in nerve cells in the brain, causing the Dementia. Lewy Bodies are also associated with Parkinson's Disease and people with Lewy Body Dementia may experience the symptoms of both conditions depending on whereabouts in the brain the Lewy Bodies are deposited. Hallucinations, delusions and sleep problems are more common in people with Lewy Body Dementia than with other types of Dementia.

Frontotemporal Dementia

Frontotemporal Dementia (also known as Picks Disease) is a less common type of Dementia. It occurs when the damage to the brain cells occurs only in the frontal lobes of the brain, found behind the forehead. This part of the brain deals with behaviour, problem-solving, planning and the control of emotions. An area of usually the left frontal lobe also controls speech. Unlike other types of Dementia, memory is not normally affected.

Mental Capacity

It is important **not** to make assumptions about mental capacity. In the early stages of Dementia people are often able to, either independently or with support;

- a) Be involved in care and support processes; and
- b) Provide an insight into their needs; and
- c) Make decisions about care or treatment; and
- d) Decide how best to manage risk; and
- e) Set their own goals and outcomes.

If any of the following indicators are present the person may *not* be able to make their own decision, and a mental capacity assessment **must** be completed *before* making a judgement about their ability to do so;

- a) Lacking a general understanding of the decision that needs to be made, and why it needs to be made;
- b) Lacking a general understanding of the likely consequences of making, or not making the decision;
- c) Being unable to understand, remember and use the information provided to them when making the decision; and
- d) Being unable to, or unable to consistently communicate the decision.

If capacity is present, the person should be supported to be involved in care and support processes and make their own decisions. They should also be encouraged to think about the ways that their views and wishes can be promoted in the future, for example whether they wish to make an Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment or appoint a Lasting Power of Attorney.

If capacity is lacking the principles of the Mental Capacity Act should be applied to ensure that any decisions made are in their Best Interests.



Preventing, Delaying and Reducing Needs

A person with Dementia will find it harder to carry out activities of daily living as their condition progresses (for example personal care routines, cooking, socialising and taking medication).

This can happen for a range of reasons, including;

- a) Forgetting how to carry out some/all of the task;
- b) Forgetting that the task needs to be carried out;
- c) Losing the skills required to carry out the task adequately or safely; and
- d) Losing the ability to maintain focus when completing the task.

The loss of independence can have a direct impact on the person's safety, but also on their mood and mental health, for example by causing anxiety, confusion, anger, frustration, fear, isolation and withdrawal.

Interventions that promote independence should always be considered, and should be provided in a timely way to ensure the greatest positive effect.

Prevention services such as Reablement, Occupational Therapy, Assistive Technology and Telecare can;

- a) Assess the person's abilities to carry out tasks; and
- b) Developing strategies to promote independence and reduce risk; and
- c) Support the person (and carer) to implement the strategies.

The abilities of a person with Dementia will change over time, and it is important that prevention services are provided in a flexible way, so as to intervene at the optimum time and adapt to any changes in ability in a timely way.

Specialist Information and Advice

The person with Dementia, their families and carers will likely have a lot of questions about the condition.

Steps should be taken to ensure that they have access to the information and advice that they need, or that would be of benefit to them.



The Alzheimer’s Society has a dedicated national information and advice line. The number is 0300 222 1122.



Independent Age also has a dedicated line, and can provide information and advice specifically about maintaining independence. The number is 0800 319 6789.

Effective Communication

It is important that communication with a person who has Dementia;

- a) Is accessible;
- b) Maximises their involvement in the process being carried out;
- c) Supports them to make, or be involved in a decision to be made; and
- d) Is sensitive and appropriate to their needs.

Depending on the person’s unique needs, the table below sets out some general rules to support effective communication when the person has Dementia.

Rule	A person with Dementia can....	Do’s	Don’ts
Meet and greet	Forget names and faces Misplace the context of a face	Introduce yourself, your role and the purpose of your visit each time	Expect the person to have remembered you
Getting to know you	Feel socially uneasy Find it difficult to start a conversation	Spend time ‘getting to know’ the person at each visit, by inviting them to talk about something that interests them	Go straight into the formal purpose of the visit
Gain my attention	Not realise you are talking to them unless you are explicit	Routinely use the person’s name and wait for recognition before speaking to them	Provide information to the room if it is meant for the person



Rule	A person with Dementia can....	Do's	Don'ts
Help me feel at ease	Become anxious, confused, angry, scared or upset by the actions of others	<p>Sit where the person can see you, do not stand over them, do not appear from behind</p> <p>Use a calm tone, smile, use positive body language and be friendly</p>	Use authoritative body language or verbal tone
Value, Respect and Dignity	Easily feel isolated, ashamed, worthless and devalued by the actions of others	<p>Speak to the person, not a family member of carer</p> <p>Speak to the person as an adult</p> <p>Seek their views and listen to what they have to say, even if it doesn't appear to make sense</p>	Talk over the person, ignore them or whisper to others
Avoid distractions	Find it difficult to focus when there are a lot of things happening around them	Keep distraction to the minimum from TV, radio and other people in the room	Proceed regardless of any distraction
Help me remember	Find it hard to retain new information	<p>Summarise key information</p> <p>Be prepared to say something more than once or answer the same question several times</p>	Expect the person to retain information without support

Rule	A person with Dementia can....	Do's	Don'ts
Help me understand	<p>Find it hard to understand the meaning and context of communication</p> <p>Misinterpret information</p>	<p>Use uncomplicated language and break things down</p> <p>Explore alternative communication, e.g. pictures and objects of reference</p> <p>Give time to process information</p>	<p>Use inaccessible formats to provide information</p>
Sometimes words are not enough	<p>Struggle to find the right words</p> <p>Forget what they want to say</p>	<p>Be reassuring</p> <p>Offer helpful alternatives-would it be easier to show me?</p> <p>Explore alternative communication, e.g. pictures and objects of reference</p>	<p>Assume to know what the person wants to say</p> <p>Assume a lack of capacity</p>
Work in the here and now	<p>Sometimes find it hard to understand the concept of the 'future', anticipate future needs and advance plan</p>	<p>Set timeframes to achieve outcomes that are meaningful to the person</p>	
Manage my anxiety	<p>Become overwhelmed by information, and this can lead to changes in mood, behaviour and engagement</p>	<p>Rephrase something</p> <p>Take a break</p> <p>Change the environment or go for a walk</p> <p>Change the subject for a while</p>	<p>Exclude the person from the conversation</p>

Rule	A person with Dementia can....	Do's	Don'ts
Don't challenge my reality	Have a false perception of reality that is very real to them	Accept the person's reality Use the information to inform the assessment Consider assessing mental capacity	Correct or challenge them as this can cause confusion, anger and anxiety and serves no purpose

To maximise the involvement of a person with Dementia in care and support processes, such as assessment, Care and Support planning and review it is likely that the format of such functions will need to be adapted, and, if the person's communication needs are complex or fluctuating seek the support of a Speech and Language Therapist.

Supporting Behaviour and Emotional Difficulties

Depending on the type of Dementia, as the person's condition progresses it is likely that they will experience changes to their mood or behaviour. Examples include;

- a) Increased confusion;
- b) Periods of distress;
- c) Periods of joy;
- d) Fear and anxiety;
- e) Frustration and anger;
- f) Physical aggression towards self and others;
- g) Suspicion and paranoia;
- h) Isolating behaviour;
- i) Loss of inhibition;
- j) 'Wandering'.

Some of these changes will be physiological, meaning they are a symptom of their condition as it progresses. However, some will not be.

Many behaviour and emotional difficulties are instead related to;

- a) A loss of independence, choice and control;
- b) A loss of physical and cognitive ability;

- c) A lack of stimulation or increased boredom;
- d) A lack of verbal communication; and
- e) Misinterpretation of the communication and actions of others.

Behaviour and emotional difficulties that are not a direct symptom of the Dementia condition can often be managed or improved by making positive changes to the person's environment or nature of support that will help them to;

- a) Maintain their independence;
- b) Communicate more effectively;
- c) Understand and manage the changes that are happening to them.

Where relevant a referral to a communication or behaviour specialist should always be considered and made.

Monitoring and Review

Depending on the type of Dementia, changes in need can be;

- a) Gradual over time;
- b) Sudden after a period of stability; or
- c) Fluctuating.

Where gradual deterioration is likely appropriate and proportionate arrangements should be made to monitor the person's situation, and to respond in a timely way to any change in need, so as to maintain independence for as long as possible.

Where sudden deterioration is anticipated there should be a contingency plan in place to ensure that any additional support needs can be met in a timely way, and the likelihood of a crisis averted.

If the person has needs that fluctuate the Care and Support Plan should be agreed with this in mind, and should provide support to meet the person's needs during periods of fluctuation and periods of stability.

NHS Continuing Healthcare

As Dementia progresses so does the likelihood of the person's eligibility for NHS Continuing Healthcare.

The NHS Continuing Healthcare checklist should be applied at each review of a Care and Support Plan, and whenever there has been a change in the person's Dementia related symptoms.

Joint Work

Dementia is a complex health condition, and it is important to;

- a) Establish which professionals and organisations are involved (or need to be involved); and
- b) Consult with them appropriately (and in line with confidentiality); and
- c) Co-operate with any requests to joint work with others.

Supporting Carers

The impact of caring for a person with Dementia should not be underestimated and every carer of a person with Dementia is likely to need support at some point over the course of their caring role.

Carers are at particularly high risk of breakdown if they have limited informal networks of support or their own health needs to manage. They are also at increased risk if the person they care for;

- a) Has fluctuating needs;
- b) Is repetitive;
- c) Does not comply with care routines (e.g. medication, eating, bathing);
- d) Seeks constant reassurance or attention from the carer;
- e) Makes regular accusations against them (e.g. of hiding things, or stealing);
- f) Is verbally or physically aggressive to the carer or others;
- g) Is restless in the evenings;
- h) 'Wanders'
- i) Needs constant supervision; and
- j) Is awake overnight.

Where a carer is known to be at high risk of breakdown it is essential that;

- a) They are offered a carers assessment; and
- b) They are provided with regular opportunities to talk; and
- c) They receive good information and advice about the support available to them.

If a carer declines an assessment of their need for support appropriate and proportionate monitoring arrangements should be agreed, and they should be offered an assessment whenever their circumstances change, or it appears an assessment would be of benefit to them.

Carers often require emotional support if the time comes when they feel unable to continue providing care to the person with Dementia, particularly if they have cared for the person for a long time or made a previous commitment to care for them always.

