

RESIDENTS WITH DEMENTIA MAY HAVE ALREADY NOTICED SOME OF THE CHANGES IN THE CARE HOME

Residents may have questions as to why things appear so different at the moment, why they aren't able to go outside, why their family can't visit, or why they have to keep distance from other people in the care home. Other residents may not be able to fully understand what the changes are but may be aware of a feeling that things are different and may miss their family and friends without having the memory of them not visiting. Residents may become more anxious, angry, stressed, withdrawn or could be suspicious during the outbreak. This guide will aim to increase the communication and understanding for our residents when explaining the changes caused by Covid-19.

1. Help residents to feel safe and reassured

- When we feel anxious or worried, this will often be communicated without us even realising through our body language, tone of voice, posture and facial expression. For example we might be tense, clench our fists or jaws and furrow our brow or tighten our lips when we are anxious.
- People with quite advanced dementia can often be very tuned into emotions, even if they find it difficult to fully comprehend what we saying -they will pick up on how we are feeling.
- Take a note of how you feel at the moment, talk to colleagues and share worries with management so that when you are with the residents you can relax as much as possible. Try to keep your sense of humour, make jokes, smile, laugh and sing with the residents as much as possible as these things will communicate safety and reassurance and will help residents to feel more relaxed and at ease.

2. Maximise communication strategies

- Break the information down into manageable, simple facts about what is happening.
- We have included an 'easy read' information sheet for residents if they would like to read the information for themselves.
- Allow the person additional time to understand what you are saying, and give them time to ask questions
- You may to repeat this information throughout the day as the cognitive impairment will make it very difficult for the individual to remember this new information so be prepared to repeat the information whenever necessary.
- Make sure the individual is wearing hearing aids and glasses when you are communicating with them, make eye contact and let them see your face as this will help with lip reading and providing clues to what you are saying.
- Consider using the visual prompts enclosed to aid understanding for those whose communication is more impaired.

3. Explaining the virus

- Part of the importance of explaining the virus will be to encourage residents to adhere to current hand washing guidelines. There will be a separate document with advice and recommendations on how to encourage residents to wash their hands regularly.
- It may be helpful to explain to residents who would be able to understand verbal communication that the impact of Covid-19 is very similar to the Spanish Influenza.
- Use words such as 'contagious' and 'nasty flu' to explain the virus. People with dementia are not able to learn new information so they will not be able to retain or understand 'Covid-19' or 'coronavirus'.
- Explain that the most common symptoms are a dry cough or a high temperature called a fever
- Be prepared to repeat the information whenever necessary

4. Explaining why the residents have to stay on site

- As above, saying phrases such as 'contagious flu' will help aid understanding of what is going on.
- Tell residents that the guidance is for everyone to stay indoors or in private gardens to keep them safe. It may be helpful to say that the government is taking this very seriously and we want to protect people with other health conditions.

5. Explaining why family can't visit

- Explain that currently the care home has to be closed to visitors to keep them safe and to avoid them becoming ill.
- Explain that their family are having to stay home to keep themselves safe too, and that it is best for them to stay there right now.
- Explore alternative ways for residents to keep in touch with their relatives and friends including phone calls, video calling or letters. There is a separate guidance sheet for this which can be provided if necessary.

6. Explaining why they have to keep your distance

- Follow guidance above on how to explain virus.
- Say that the flu spreads when people are too close, so we need to stay apart to stop it spreading.
- It will be very difficult to adhere to social distancing completely, and by doing so it may result in further distress from the resident. Try to keep distance as much as possible without causing distress. Again we have produced separate guidance on caring for individuals who 'walk with purpose'.

For more suggestions, support or if you have any questions about this information sheet please get in contact with the Edinburgh Behaviour Support Service on 0131 537 6044 or email us on EBSS@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk