

IMPACT OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

During the COVID-19 pandemic staff may need to wear protective equipment like aprons, gloves and masks when completing personal care with individuals who have a confirmed diagnosis. This could obviously be quite disorientating and potentially scary for the residents, especially if they have some level of cognitive impairment. Imagine how it would feel if someone came into your room first thing in the morning wearing that equipment!

For individuals who may already find personal care difficult to tolerate, the introduction of personal protective equipment is likely to exacerbate distress. Unfortunately it will also make it more difficult for the individual to recognise carers that they are usually familiar with. Additionally if there is a lot of staff sickness within your team, there may be new members of staff or bank staff attending to people with dementia who have not worked with them before.

SOME IDEAS TO REDUCE THE ANXIETY FOR THE RESIDENTS

- Ensure all new staff or bank staff familiarise themselves with care plans before attempting to assist, even where time is limited. Buddy up experienced staff with less experienced staff to ensure continuity of approach, particularly for individuals who find personal care difficult.
- Laminate a photograph of yourself with your first name and wear it on your uniform so that it is visible to help the resident recognise you, this could help to make the masks less intimidating. Prepare everything before you need in advance of the task to minimise time spent in the equipment.
- Before you go in, notice how you are feeling; if you are anxious or scared the person with dementia may pick up on your body language or facial expression they are likely to feel the same. Take a deep breath and try to remain calm, positive and reassuring when you enter.
- Knock on the residents door and enter slowly, greeting the resident using their name and introducing yourself with a smile and a wave, stating your name and your role.
- See how they respond and give the person time to attend to you visually before approaching them. Try not to approach too quickly to avoid a startle reflex.
- Acknowledge the mask or equipment you are wearing saying "sorry I look a bit funny today, I'm wearing this to protect us both from any bugs or germs we might have"
- Depending on the resident you could make a joke about your gear
- If the person finds it difficult to understand you with the mask on, consider using laminated signs with basic information eg 'I'm here to help'. These can be wiped down after the care task.
- Use all the skills you would usually to put the resident at ease, hold their hand, use gentle touch, squeeze a shoulder, talk about their family or pictures in their room. Hum a tune together or get some relaxing music on in the room. All of these things will help to communicate safety and reassurance.

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