

Health Care Sector


HOSPITALS

SPECIAL CHALLENGES Hospitals can be stressful places for individuals with dementia. Bright lights, noise and many people talking at once can be overwhelming. When individuals with dementia become overwhelmed, it can be very difficult to understand and follow directions. They may become upset and may not cooperate with medical personnel.

Memory loss may cause individuals with dementia to wander and not stay in their hospital beds. They may not remember why they are in the hospital and may try to leave. Infections and untreated pain may be difficult to assess in individuals with dementia as they may cause delirium, agitation and a refusal to cooperate. However, these conditions must be assessed to determine appropriate treatment.



WHAT TO DO When working with someone with dementia, hospitals can calm their environments by eliminating unnecessary noise, conversation, flashing lights or buzzers and unnecessary personnel. Moving to a quiet location and, if possible, including a family member or other familiar person in the assessment process can help. When the person with dementia does not remember, someone who is living with the individual with dementia can be a critical source of information to provide answers to questions about the condition and circumstances that led to the hospital visit. They can also help the individual remain calm and help in understanding what is happening. When individuals with dementia refuse needed tests and other diagnostic procedures, be aware of the many options available for obtaining samples and gathering the information needed to make a diagnostic determination.



Wandering is one of the most common symptoms for individuals with dementia. When someone with dementia is admitted to the hospital, they will likely be bored and not stay in bed, and may wander. Depending on their condition, allowing individuals with dementia to go for walks will help alleviate many potential challenges in providing care. Engaging family, friends or volunteers to stay with the person can be very helpful.

PRIMARY CARE CLINICS

SPECIAL CHALLENGES Patients may be reluctant to discuss their concerns about memory loss or other cognitive issues due to the stigma and fear of dementia. If someone has a dementia, it will complicate all other aspects of their care and inhibit the person's ability to follow through with treatment plans, properly take medications, manage chronic conditions and even recognize the need to seek medical treatment.

WHAT TO DO Making the diagnosis of dementia as early in the disease process as possible is critical. The goal of a dementia-friendly community is to assure that individuals who receive a diagnosis of dementia can continue to enjoy life. Primary care providers should encourage connections with community resources and programs so individuals can stay physically and socially active. To support the individual with dementia, providers should be aware of his/her limited ability to follow instructions and provide or connect him/her with additional support through family members or other professionals who can continue to provide support in the home.

PHARMACISTS

SPECIAL CHALLENGES Dementia can affect an individual's judgment, memory and ability to follow instructions independently and, as a result, create difficulty in taking medications as directed. Many older adults see more than one physician who prescribes medications, which can result in medication interactions and unintended side effects. Having diabetes also increases an individual's risk of developing dementia.





WHAT TO DO

Pharmacists have a unique opportunity to observe changes in someone who may have an unrecognized dementia. Possible signs of dementia include not properly managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, erratic compliance in taking medications, repeated contacts to the pharmacy for the same issue and failure to pick up important prescriptions in a timely manner. Contacting the local adult protective services staff can serve as a means to alert others in a position to help the individual with dementia.

PHYSICAL THERAPY, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND HOME HEALTH


SPECIAL CHALLENGES

Memory loss can make it difficult to remember appointments. Individuals with dementia may not come to therapy appointments or be home for home health visits. Dementia makes it difficult to independently follow an exercise or other therapy plan and to arrive at goals within a specific time frame. Appointments in the home of an individual with dementia can provide insight into other challenges the person may be facing and may make it easier to identify what to do with concerns outside of home health or therapy.

WHAT TO DO

Calling ahead to remind an individual with dementia of appointments only works if it happens very close to the time of the appointment. A call the day before or even several hours earlier may be forgotten. Therapists and home health staff should (1) be aware of whether the individual with dementia has a caregiver, (2) ascertain if the caregiver lives with the individual or provides transportation, and (3) if necessary, obtain the proper permission to communicate with the caregiver directly about appointments and care plans. If an individual is having difficulty following an exercise plan or other instructions, the therapist or staff should suggest a recorded video to follow or provide a written guide with the exercises and instructions that can be shared with the caregiver or family members. For individuals with dementia, it is important to keep the exercise program and instructions short and simple. Occasional follow-up telephone calls can be





helpful to check in regarding any questions or concerns and as a reminder to individuals to view the video or written instructions.

When in the home of an individual with dementia, the therapist or home health staff should contact the local adult protective services unit to share any concerns regarding abuse. If other unmet needs or special challenges are observed, ask if the individual with dementia or their caregiver shares the concern and provide a referral to the aging and disability resource center in the county to provide information and assistance.

DENTISTS

SPECIAL CHALLENGES Individuals with dementia have challenges maintaining good oral health due to changes with their cognitive status and functional ability. Older adults have additional oral health challenges that put them at higher risk for dental conditions, such as dry mouth making a person more susceptible for dental caries/cavities, poor nutritional intake that lessen a person's ability to fight infection and bone loss, and gingival tissue/gum infection from periodontal disease. Cognitive issues can make it difficult for the individual to remember the tasks needed to accomplish oral health care tasks. Decreased dexterity from conditions like arthritis may require adaptive aids to facilitate the ability to perform oral health care tasks. People in more advanced stages of disease may not be able to communicate their needs and are at higher risk of experiencing pain and oral disease.

WHAT TO DO Caregivers who have firsthand knowledge on the preferences and personality of the individual with dementia can provide vital information to the oral health care provider on strategies for a successful dental care experience. Every individual with dementia should be screened daily or weekly for oral health changes with plans provided to address these changes. When the individual with dementia seeks dental care in an unfamiliar setting, the oral health care provider should allow a family member or friend to sit by the person to maintain eye contact or hold his/her hand as a calming influence. As long periods sitting in a dental chair may be more difficult for individuals with dementia, limiting the time length of appointments is helpful.



Creating a calm environment where noise and other stimulation are kept to a minimum will help an individual with dementia remain calm and cooperative. Practicing good chairside manner and always alerting the individual to what is about to happen will help to maintain his/her cooperation. It is very important for the individual with dementia, the caregiver and the oral health care provider to work together. When performing dental procedures on an individual with dementia, all caregivers and oral health care providers should remember to explain the experience to the individual, let the family be involved and allow the individual to set the pace.

RESIDENTIAL CARE PROVIDERS

Residential care facilities support dementia-friendly community efforts in several ways. As members of the community with special knowledge of dementia, they can provide training to increase awareness and understanding of dementia as well as the needs of individuals with dementia. As business owners, they can reach out to other businesses to engage them in the initiative, offer meeting spaces and other materials and initiate dementia-friendly community efforts.

DEMENTIA AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS

The Alzheimer's Association and the Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin are leaders in the development of dementia-friendly communities and are critical to the success of any initiative. These organizations have experts in the field of dementia care with a wide variety of information and educational materials and programs to support families and caregivers of individuals with dementia. Inviting these entities to participate in local dementia-friendly community efforts is an important component of any effort. They can provide leadership, meeting space and informational presentations to a variety of audiences.

