

Tips for Careworkers: Advanced Dementia



What it is: Dementia is a group of diseases affecting the brain. Over time the person loses everyday skills.

Why it matters: There is no cure for dementia. It is a life-limiting illness. Palliative care is needed with advanced dementia. The focus is on quality of life. When a person enters a care facility, they often have advanced dementia.

Careworkers can take an active role in supporting the person with dementia to express their wishes and report any changes in the person's condition. Getting to know the person well will assist in providing care.

People with dementia often have other diseases like heart disease, high blood pressure, and chest disease. Frailty and pain are common. They may need palliative care before they reach an advanced stage of dementia.

What I need to know: Dementia is most common in people over 65 years of age, but not all old people have dementia. Dementia can affect younger people.

A person with dementia may experience loss of:

- memory
- good sense and judgement
- ability to talk
- social skills
- physical functioning.

As dementia advances people have difficulty with:

- going to the toilet, washing, eating and drinking, walking
- making decisions
- being able to remember recent events
- thinking things through.

At all stages, the person with dementia still has their own likes and dislikes. Remember that even if a person with dementia is unable to speak, they may still sense the presence of loved ones and experience fear and loss.

It can be difficult to know when a person with dementia is approaching the end of their life.

Do

Check for signs of deterioration such as changes in:

- level of pain
- alertness
- care needs
- behaviour e.g., agitation and distress
- oral intake
- sense of comfort or discomfort.

Report changes to nursing/supervisory staff.

Name:

My reflections:

What other diseases might a person with dementia have?

What tasks might a person with dementia have difficulty with? How can I help?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Case Conferences
Palliative Care
Recognising Deterioration

References used to develop this sheet are available at
www.palliaged.com.au