

Good care in a residential aged care home

This help sheet lists some of the important aspects of good care for people with dementia who are living in residential aged care homes, including the involvement of relatives and friends.

Good care is based on how well a residential care home responds to each resident's needs. Some aspects of good care will vary between individuals according to their needs and preferences. You may have to weigh up a number of issues and prioritise what is important to you in the care of the person with dementia.

The following is a list of important aspects of good care. You might find that in the particular aged care home you visit there is a need for improvement in some areas. If this is the case you should first discuss your concerns with management. If you still have concerns you may wish to seek advice from Dementia Australia who can direct you to appropriate organisations in your State or Territory.

Important aspects of good care

This list of aspects of good care is by no means exhaustive. You can probably think of other aspects that may be even more important to you. For some people flexibility about meals, unrestricted visiting hours, or privacy and space for the resident and visitors to have time together are also essential aspects of good care. This list is not in any particular order of priority. All of these aspects are important.

1. An effective approach to care

Effective dementia care requires strong leadership and support by managers as well as by direct care staff. It also requires more staff to care for residents than general residential care and a focus on resident centred care. Resident centred care provides individualised care for the resident to ensure their physical, social, cultural and mental wellbeing.

Staff need training and skills in dementia care and management of special needs in order to provide good care. Staff should be encouraged to adopt and implement a resident centred approach to care. This provides the individual resident with support at a level required to maintain their well being. In providing the necessary support for an individual, the service encourages the resident to maintain their independence, preferences and chosen lifestyle as much as possible.

Experience has shown that some separate areas are beneficial for the good care of people with dementia who have special needs. These needs may arise from behaviour such as restlessness or wandering which are common in people with dementia. If a dementia specific unit is not possible, then an area such as a wing, or even a room, could be utilised to provide separation and safety.

Other ways of caring for people with dementia who may be agitated or restless are:

- Good dementia design including safe wandering areas
- Individualised activity programs
- A quiet area away from the TV
- A massage with calming perfumed oil
- The presence of pets may have a significant calming effect

At times it may be necessary to get advice from a psychogeriatrician, who might suggest a medication review, or in extreme cases, assessment in a special unit.

Any special care needs should be addressed in the care plan. You should be asked for your input in developing strategies and actions that may be required to manage specific behaviours.

2. Culturally appropriate care

Adopting a care approach that seeks to know and understand each resident in the context of their culture, is a start to providing good care to people with dementia from all cultural backgrounds. Every effort should be made to communicate in their preferred language and to provide a culturally familiar environment.

3. Involvement of relatives and friends

Good dementia care must involve relatives and friends as much as possible. This includes consulting and actively involving them in care planning and review. They should be treated as partners in caring, not just as someone who can help at meal times. Family and friends should be encouraged to be involved in residents' meetings and committees and to join any support groups.

4. Effective pain management

Often when people with dementia are in pain they are unable to tell anyone. The only way that we know that they are in pain is through changes in their behaviour, such as restlessness, irritability or aggression. It is important to be sure that pain is not the underlying cause of any change in behaviour.

Good pain management lowers the occurrence of confusion and distress and reduces the need for psychotropic medications (medications which relax and sedate people). Staff should have the clinical skills in pain assessment and management and should acknowledge and utilise the experience of families and carers in this area. The goal of good pain management is to ensure that the resident is pain free. This can also mean looking at alternative approaches to pain control such as massage, acupuncture etc.

5. Using minimal restraint

Best practice nursing care means that physical and chemical restraint is rarely necessary except in extreme circumstances.

Physical devices such as vests, straps, wrist ties, splints, casts, mitts, restraining belts, bed rails, wheelchair bars and brakes, binders and bed sheets are some mechanisms that are sometimes used as restraints. Other approaches such as isolating the person in a locked or separate room can also be considered as restraint.

Chemical restraints include tranquillisers and sedatives when used outside their therapeutic role.

The aged care home must have a policy on this and should make it available to you. Ask for a copy if you haven't seen one.

6. Specialist supports

Access to specialist psychogeriatric assessment and advice in the management of dementia is important in providing good care for people with dementia. The advice of other allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dieticians or psychologists may also be very useful in attaining the best quality of life for the person with dementia.

Remember

The key to good care is ensuring that the environment is as home-like as possible and centred on a flexible approach to providing the best possible support for the resident.

Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**