

Communicating with Clients Living with Dementia in Long Term Care While Protecting Ourselves

Let's Remember:

Due to the ongoing concerns related to COVID-19, Residents with dementia may experience increased anxiety and/or confusion while they're in quarantine. Residents are currently isolated from family, friends and loved ones due to current visiting restrictions which may be impacting their mental health and ability to socialize with others.

In addition, for the safety of both Residents and health care workers, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (Such as Masks) may limit or hinder the ability for Residents to connect with their health care workers. Existing behavioural and psychological symptoms may be heightened, and these Patients may be at a greater risk of developing new or progressing Responsive Behaviours and/or Delirium.

Barriers to Communication:

- The Resident is unable to read facial expressions.
- The Resident is unable to see your mouth as you form words.
- The Resident may hear a muted/muffled version of what you are trying to say and may misinterpret your words.
- The Resident may be unaware that you are trying to communicate with them.
- The Resident may not understand why you are wearing a mask.
- Wearing a mask may evoke fear in the Resident.

Strategies to Improve Communication:

- Approach from the front and ensure the Resident sees you.
- Make eye contact so the Resident knows you are talking to them
(Remember any cultural considerations regarding eye contact).
- Use touch (shoulder or hand), if appropriate (personal preference/cultural preference).
- Use clear, short and simple sentences.
- Be aware of the tone of your voice, when speaking.
- Continue to use the Resident's preferred name.
- Continue to ask permission before engaging in any tasks.
- If the Resident has hearing loss, speak on their dominant side or on the side they are wearing their hearing aid(s).
- Allow the Resident more time to process what is being said (remember, this may take approximately 30-40 secs).
- Consider using a white board to communicate information.
- Consider using communication cards with words/pictures of any tasks.
- Consider using appropriate non-verbal cues including gestures demonstrating what you are asking of the Resident (i.e helping the person to dress or bringing them a meal).
- If the Resident has questions surrounding precautions or PPE, provide simplified explanations.
- If communication is not going well for you or the Resident, stop what you are doing (as long as the individual is not at risk) and re approach at another time when you/the individual have de-escalated
- Even though you are wearing a mask, continue to smile as this may change your tone.

Reminder for Self-Care:

Many staff are likely dealing with increased workloads and/or added stress both in the workplace & at home. It is important for Staff to look after their own Physical & Mental Health during these times.

Thank you for all that you do!