

Reach-Out



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Reduce, Educate, Assess, & Care with Hope

Delirium Service - Information for Carers

What is Delirium?

Delirium is a state of confusion caused by physical illness. It comes on suddenly over hours or days. It can be a worsening of pre-existing confusion. The degree of confusion may vary over the course of the day. Early diagnosis and support is important for any memory problem, particularly Dementia.

As well as confusion some people will experience other symptoms which can include:

- Agitation
- Drowsiness
- Difficulty sleeping at night
- Hallucinations (voices or visions, hearing/ seeing things that are not really there)
- Misinterpretation
- Delusions or troublesome thoughts (false beliefs)
- Fear, anxiety or terror
- Apathy
- Inability to concentrate
- Inability to think clearly.

What causes Delirium?

As with most conditions there are factors that can increase the risk of you developing delirium. The known risk factors include:

- Increased age, being 65 years of age or older
- Having pre-existing cognitive impairment (memory loss)
- Severe illness such as renal or heart failure
- Hip fractures

Things that cause Delirium are wide ranging and Delirium can be caused by just one or a combination of these factors. Sometimes we are not able to identify the specific cause of the Delirium.



Causes include:

- Infection-this can be a urine infection, chest infection, infection of the blood, skin or other systems in the body
- Constipation
- Certain drugs such as morphine
- Dehydration
- Diabetes
- Abnormal blood chemistry
- Pain
- Hypoxia (a lack of oxygen getting to the brain)
- Immobility (as a result of stroke or hip fracture for example)
- Sleep deprivation
- Withdrawal from drugs or alcohol

Is it the same as Dementia? - No Delirium is not the same as Dementia

Dementia is a progressive decline in cognitive functioning which is ongoing (usually over a long period of time) and is not reversible. Delirium is reversible. Someone with Dementia can develop a Delirium which will cause them to be more confused than their normal level, however this will normally resolve once the Delirium is treated.

What can be done for Delirium?

'Reach-out'

The service aims to screen, prevent and help treat Delirium across the hospital site.

As we know the groups of people that are at increased risk of developing Delirium. We can closely monitor them and takes steps to try to prevent Delirium developing. If someone comes into hospital who is already suffering from Delirium or if Delirium develops whilst they are in hospital the first step in treating the Delirium is to identify the cause or causes and treat them.

Next the many disciplines in the hospital will be working together to try to minimise the effects and length of time that the Delirium is present until it resolves.

These steps include:

- Ensuring adequate lighting
- Ensuring that any eyesight or hearing problems are addressed
- Encouraging mobilising (walking)
- Ensuring adequate diet and fluids are taken
- Assessing and treating pain
- Promoting good sleep patterns by minimising night time disruptions and noise
- Encouraging family support

- Minimising unnecessary moves around the ward and hospital
- Making sure that the correct medications are prescribed and any unnecessary medications are discontinued
- Avoid unnecessary procedures
- Providing cognitive stimulation (getting the brain working with activities such as reminiscing)

Medication:

Sometimes if someone is experiencing distress due to the symptoms of Delirium it is necessary to prescribe medication. ***This is always a last resort and is used in small doses, on a very short term basis*** (usually no more than a week).

Does it get better?

Mostly Delirium does get better. In some cases this can happen quite quickly once the cause of the Delirium has been identified and treated. At other times the Delirium can take longer to fully resolve. This can be weeks and sometimes months. Occasionally symptoms of confusion can persist much longer.

Advice for family and friends:

If your relative or friend is suffering from Delirium, regular contact with familiar people is very important. This can help calm the person down, re-orientate them and provide them with assurance in what can often be a very frightening time for them.

Just sitting with your relative or friend making small talk and reassuring them can help. Talk clearly about familiar non-threatening topics.

Avoid direct questions which your relative may not know the answer to (such as what did the doctor say today). Use calm tones. You may have to repeat yourself.

Avoid confrontation and arguments if your relative says something which is incorrect, just redirect the conversation.

Sometimes just being there can help. Check with ward staff if you are able to visit outside of regular visiting times.

You may feel you need reassurance yourself and this is understandable. Ask to speak to one of the doctors or nurses looking after your relative. Alternatively ask to speak to one of the staff from the 'Reach-Out' team.

By working together with the ward team a quicker recovery can be achieved.

Useful numbers:

Alzheimer's Society – information, support and signposting for people with a diagnosis of Dementia and their carers. For more details contact 01228 819299. Extended Helpline 0300 222 11 22

Age UK – Promote the wellbeing of older people and to help make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. For more details contact 01228 536673

Carlisle Carers Association – information and support on all aspects of caring including benefits advice and carers assessments. For more information contact 01228 542156

Memory Matters Carlisle - Providing assessment, diagnosis, information, support and interventions. Dedicate support carers via carer lead. For more details contact 01228 602100

Confidentiality

'The Trust's vision is to keep your information safe in our hands.'

We promise to use your information fairly and legally, and in-line with local and national policies. You have a right to understand how your information is used and you can request a copy of the information we hold about you at any time.

For further information contact the Information Governance Team on 01228 608998 or email Information.Governance@cumbria.nhs.uk

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback, which helps us to improve our services. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints to make about your care, please contact the Patient Experience Team.

Email: PET@cumbria.nhs.uk Tel: 01228 602128 Freephone: 0800 633 5547

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call:

01228 603890

E: communications.helpdesk@cumbria.nhs.uk

Or write to Engagement and Communications
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