

My home life Cymru

Open your heart to see me

A guide to working in dementia care



Introduction

My Home Life Cymru aims to promote quality of life for those who are living, dying, visiting or working in a care home for older people through relationship centred, evidence based practice.

My Home Life Cymru celebrates and shares existing practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people.



This booklet is for care staff working with residents who have a dementia; it uses the eight best practice themes that have been developed by the My Home Life programme as a framework for good dementia care.

Please remember that everyone is different and the experience of dementia will vary according to what area of the brain is affected, how far the dementia has progressed and what form of dementia the person has.

As care staff you are vigilant, you are observant, you are attentive and aware. You are able to see the resident sitting in the lounge and to anticipate their needs. But, are you opening your heart to really see the resident as a person with feelings and emotional needs? Do you know what gives the resident comfort and worth?

This guide will encourage you to keep the person central and open your heart to see them.

My Home Life best practice themes

- Maintaining identity
- Sharing decision making
- Creating community
- Managing transitions
- Improving health and healthcare
- Supporting good end of life
- Promoting a positive culture
- Keeping workforce fit for purpose

Maintaining identity

What makes you tick? What makes you happy and gives you comfort? What makes you sad, angry or fearful? What makes you the person that you are today?

Everyone has unique life experiences that have shaped the person they are. Maintaining identity is about seeing the person for who they are and putting the person before the dementia. It is essential to find out what roles the person has held in their lives and continue to have today.

Is the resident a daughter, mother, wife, worker, dancer or friend? All of these roles have a purpose - being in a relationship with someone, providing and receiving care, experiencing love, occupation and enjoyment. With your support the resident can continue experiencing the emotions attached to these roles.



Some tips

- It is important to gain an insight into the resident's life history. Talk to them about their lives, create a memory box and include their relatives in this work.
- Be creative. Fill your home with objects of interest to those who live there. Consider objects that link to a person's job or provide sensory stimulation.
- Ensure that care plans focus on the strengths and abilities of the person rather than their limitations. Positive care planning will set the tone for staff to keep the person central to their work.

Sharing decision-making

A care home is a place of communal living; it cannot function well without good communication. Relationship centred care is something that will ensure the views of all residents, staff members and relatives are heard and joined together.

The ability to communicate through words and understand what others say is affected by dementia therefore awareness of non-verbal communication is very important.



Never give up on a person. There is always a way to understand what someone is trying to communicate but it takes time, patience and perseverance.

Some tips

- Consider tone, body language and facial expressions. If a person is agitated reassure them with your body language by looking at them, gently touch their hand and use a calm voice.
- Provide visual clues for example show a tea pot if asking about having a cup of tea, flash cards can be used. Do not offer lots of choices at once, wait for an answer and limit other distractions in the room such as TV or radio.
- Involve relatives; they will want to help you understand their loved ones. Relatives, along with staff, can help support residents make decisions about their care.

Creating community

When you walk into an unfamiliar situation how do you feel? What does it take to help you feel at ease? A friendly face? Reassuring words? Perhaps you have the urge to walk away?

These feelings will not differ for a person who has dementia and because the person cannot store recent memories these feelings are experienced again and again.

As a resident you should feel welcomed, there should be someone there if you need them, you should see activity and the opportunity to join others and have somewhere to go if you want to be alone.

By creating a community that is accessible to all it will improve the quality of care in the home and the experiences of those who live, visit and work there.

Some tips

- Does your home adapt the living space to meet the needs of those who live there? Do the chairs in the lounge line the walls or are they placed thoughtfully so a person can see out of a window, sit in a small group or share a settee with someone they like to be close too? Are there lots of things around the home providing interest and valuing life histories? There should always be opportunities for residents, staff and visitors to connect with one another.
- To feel part of a community people need to feel included. Take the focus away from control and encourage a busy atmosphere where, for example residents can make drinks, wash up and potter in the garden. Aim to be a home where residents and staff eat together and enjoy the company of visitors.
- The world outside the home can play a part in the residents' life - invite the local community in. Social events are a good way to link people together. Make provision for residents to continue the activities they enjoyed before moving into care. Using volunteers in the home can help with this.

Managing transitions

Moving from home to a care home is a major life change. For people who live with a dementia it may be a transition resulting from a crisis, perhaps following an admission to hospital, the breakdown of care at home or the loss of a loved one. You may have very little information about the person placed in your care home - their needs, likes, dislikes and how they would like to receive their care. It is always important to seek information about the person from relatives and friends and to encourage them to be part of the move.

For everyone who moves into a care home the common experience is loss. For someone who has a dementia this is a very real feeling and needs to be managed with care. Everything about the home you work in will be unfamiliar to the new resident so the care on admission is especially important to ensure that they are put at ease.

Consider this as the start of a new relationship between you and the resident. When we meet someone new we do not know

everything about them, this takes time. Be in the moment with the person, think about how they are feeling at that time and respond with kindness, the person with dementia will feel you there with them.

Some tips

- Talk to relatives about continuing to be involved in the care of their loved one. Help them to feel part of the life at your home while being aware of their feelings and giving time to support their needs.
- Be accepting of personal items being brought into the home, the resident will be comforted by the sight, touch and smell of their own belongings. Photographs are an excellent conversation point and will help build a picture of the resident's life.
- Be aware of the residents' reactions to the home through words, sounds and body language. Remember that there is always a reason behind behaviour and the person is trying to tell you something.

Improving health and healthcare



Accurate information about a resident's health is essential to good quality care. A person with a dementia may have other health care needs which should be documented in their care plan. Neglecting the physical health of a person will impact on their mental well being and ability to manage daily life.

A person living with a dementia needs ongoing support from specialist services whether they live in a care home or not. Their health should be reviewed by the Community Mental Health Team and the resident, staff and relatives should know how to contact them if necessary.

Some tips

- A person with dementia may not be able to say that they are in pain. Look for signs of discomfort when a resident is eating, using the toilet, walking or being assisted to move. Increased confusion or agitation can be a sign of pain or infection.
- If you notice a change in the person, check it is not linked to their emotional wellbeing, a reaction to an adjustment in the home or a side effect of their prescribed medication.
- Build good links with GP's and other health care providers. Be open about any concerns, give your opinion and be assertive, you know the resident and you know when something is not right.



Supporting good end of life

Provision of good end of life care is often neglected because we find it difficult to talk about death and dying. We should do everything possible to enable residents to die peacefully, without pain and not alone.

The final stages of a person's life should not be shut away. Loosing someone will impact on everyone and recognising the need for a grieving process is essential.

It is possible to make a plan that will include the personal wishes of the individual with a dementia including support from their family.

The emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the resident can be met by asking gentle questions, considering past history and observing what gives comfort.

Some tips

- Use your experience of the resident and do not be afraid to try different ways of giving comfort. Considering spiritual need is particularly important, hearing scripture, prayer or holding a religious object could help. Maybe arrange a visit from a local religious leader?
- Do not make assumptions, perhaps a resident who has not been tactile in everyday life will want to be held at the end of their life.
- Remember the relatives, friends and other residents who would like to say goodbye. Make provision for a loved one to stay with the resident. Share the news of a death, do not be afraid to talk about the person and use pictures to illustrate their life and death. A memorial service at the home will assist the grieving process.
- Care workers need to grieve too. Do not hide behind your professional role, never underestimate the impact of watching someone die and allow yourself to feel the loss. You should receive support from your manager and colleagues.

Promoting a positive culture

Working with people who have a dementia is not always easy. It is emotional. You must allow yourself to feel the emotions attached to the care you give and be aware of the feelings of others in your team. If you do not see the relevance of this, you cannot support the emotional needs of the residents. A positive culture of care does not suppress feelings, it encourages you to open your heart and be human.

At the heart of good dementia care is the feeling you get from a home. The residents, relatives, staff and visitors should feel part of something good. A home for people with dementia should provide occupation, opportunities and friendship. The home should not feel like a hospital or hotel.

Some tips

- Think of domestic tasks as opportunities for residents to join in and feel useful. By doing this you are encouraging ordinary life to go on. Use everyday tasks as an opportunity to connect with the residents. Be prepared to enter the resident's reality and be in the moment with them.
- Fill the home with everyday items. The home may look untidy but if you look closer you will see items that stimulate the senses and have relevance to the lives of your residents.
- Care planning should be about what the resident can do, not what they cannot do. Do not use negative terms, focus on the positives and be sensitive to individual differences.

Keeping workforce fit for purpose

Working with residents who have a dementia is a specialised role.

You can't learn about dementia by just studying diagrams of the brain.

You learn more by being with residents and receiving training that is interactive and practical.

The quality of care you give will improve if you are given opportunities to learn, develop and share your skills in the home.

Some tips

- Available training opportunities should be well publicised and form part of your supervision. You and your manager have a responsibility to your development so do not be afraid to ask for training.
- Does your home provide in-house training, mentoring or a buddy system? Are staff encouraged to share their skills by informal training? Your team will have a variety of skills and life experiences that can be used to improve life in the home.

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This training guide is one of a series of booklets supplementing My Home Life Cymru training sessions.

Age Cymru
Tŷ John Pathy, 13-14 Neptune Court
Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ
t 029 2043 1555 f 029 2047 1418
www.agecymru.org.uk/mhlc
e-mail: mhlc@agecymru.org.uk



Age Cymru is the new force combining Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales. Age Cymru is a registered charity 1128346. Company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales 6837284. Registered office address; Tŷ John Pathy, 13/14 Neptune Court, Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ.