



Caring for Someone Living with Dementia - 09

WORKING WITH DOCTORS

This Help Sheet discusses effective ways of working together with the many doctors and medical specialists you will meet to obtain the information and support that you need.

A person diagnosed with dementia will have contact with many health professionals, usually over a long period of time. This will most likely include the family doctor, medical specialists, therapists, community nurses and social workers. The degenerative nature of dementia means that families and care partners will also have a lot of contact with these health professionals. As the disease progresses these contacts will almost certainly increase. Usually it is the family doctor who provides on-going health care, sometimes for both the person with dementia and the family and care partners. This means that the relationship between the doctor, the person with dementia, family and care partners is critical.

Where to begin

A useful way to think about working with doctors is to regard the doctors, family members and care partners as part of a team, which aims to provide the best possible care for the person with dementia.

Every person brings specific knowledge and skills to the team. Family and care partners are usually in the best position to bring detailed information about the needs of the person with dementia and to monitor their well-being.

Remember

Doctors cannot talk about their patients without their consent. If the person with dementia tells the doctor that no information is to be given to relatives, the doctor must abide by this. However, information can be provided to the doctor, with the doctor deciding on how that information will be used in treating their patient.

However, most people with dementia want to talk about their condition with someone close to them. This is generally done by talking to the doctor together.

A good doctor for a person with dementia, their family and care partners:

- Is a ready source of advice and support.
- Listens to you and your opinions.
- Explains things in words that you can understand.
- Takes time to answer your questions.
- Helps you feel comfortable.
- Provides the opportunity for you to give information discreetly.
- Is respectful of the person with dementia, as well as their family and care partners.

What to try

Communicating with the doctor Communication is a two-way process. You need to let the doctor know what it is you want from him or her. If you don't understand what is being said, ask to have it explained in a different way.



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Relatives can always talk to the doctor about their concerns and sometimes find it useful to ring or send written information to the doctor before an appointment to fill them in on details they don't feel able to discuss when the person with dementia is present.

You should be able to talk freely to any doctor. Remember that all discussions are confidential.

Getting the information you need

Some people find it helpful to make a list of questions to ask so that they don't forget anything. Others keep a diary of the person's behavior and use it to explain aspects that are causing concern. Ask the health professional to write down what has been said so that you can look at it later and remind yourself, or take notes yourself.

Keeping track

Many people find that it is helpful to keep a folder or notes about their conversations with doctors and who they spoke to and when. Sometimes it can feel as if you have spoken to so many people that you can't remember the details of what was discussed with whom.

Making time

Make appointments at suitable times of the day. If the early morning or late afternoon is difficult for the person with dementia, avoid these times for appointments. Ask for a longer appointment if you feel you need it. If there are long waiting times when arriving for an appointment and this is difficult, ask if something can be done to reduce the waiting time.

Speak up for yourself

Sometimes it isn't easy to get the information you need. Be prepared to look around until you find a doctor who meets your needs and the needs of the person with dementia. Talking to other families and care partners about their experiences may help.

Referrals

Most doctors refer to a range of specialists they use regularly and have close contact with. You can however ask for a referral to the specialist of your choice.

Remember

If the service provided by a doctor is not meeting the needs of the person with dementia and family and care partners, sometimes the best thing is to change doctors

FURTHER INFORMATION: locally call Dementia Friendly Wyoming 307-461-7134 or visit our website <http://www.dwfsheridan.org> or The Sheridan Senior Center 307-672-2240. Nationally contact the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900, or visit their website at <http://www.alz.org>.