

**Mental Health of Older Adults and Dementia  
Mental Health Care Home Intervention Team**  
  
Email: CCHIT@slam.nhs.uk

**Croydon Care Home Intervention Team**

**Supporting Care Home Residents with Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia during the COVID-19 Outbreak**

This document aims to support care home staff to understand and manage possible changes in the behaviour of people with dementia during the COVID-19 outbreak.

**How can COVID-19 impact people with dementia?**

Environment

All residents will likely experience significant changes to their environment and routine, including:

* Family and loved ones no longer able to visit
* Reduced access to meaningful occupation
* Staff changes
* Interactions with staff wearing PPE
* Possible increased anxiety in staff teams
* Introduction of new infection control procedures

These changes may lead residents to feel **bored***,* **isolated***,* **frightened**, **unsafe***,* and/or **anxious**. We know that people with dementia can convey how they feel through their behaviour. These changes may therefore lead to an increase in pre-existing behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) or to the emergence of new BPSD, which staff may find difficult to understand.

Physical Health

* Residents with COVID-19 will experience physical discomfort, which may lead to the increase or emergence of BPSD.
* Residents with COVID-19 may develop delirium as a result of the infection. In this case, guidance on the management of delirium should be followed, including:
  + Treatment for symptom relief
  + Ensuring adequate food and fluid intake
  + Reducing unnecessary medical interventions
  + Non-pharmacological and environmental support strategies
  + See document titled *COVID-19 and Pharmacological Management of Delirium* for further information.

Emotional Reactions

It is normal for all of us to be worried about our health, our families, and the people we love and care for in this time. This is no different for people with dementia. Some may understand what is going on in the world and feel worried. Others may pick up on the emotions of their carers, and feel anxious or restless. These emotional reactions, coupled with a lack of understanding, may result in behaviours which carers find difficult to understand.

**What can you do to support residents?**

Steps can be taken to reduce feelings of boredom, isolation, fear, and anxiety. This will promote residents’ wellbeing and reduce distress, which in turn may prevent the emergence or increase of BPSD.

Environment

* Consider setting up special areas for people with dementia with a soothing environment (e.g. soft lighting, gentle music).
* When appropriate, facilitate contact with family members through video conferencing or telephone.

Communication

* If staff wear masks, residents will not see their facial expressions and may become frightened. Consider laminating a smiling face and attach this to clothing/PPE.
* Consider laminating staff name and picture of role to attach to clothing/PPE.
* Communicate in a simple and clear way. Always make eye contact, introduce yourself, and explain what you are going to do. Speak clearly and use direct, short sentences. Repeat yourself if needed.
* When wearing masks, consider using more frequent verbal encouragement and reassurance.

Care approaches

* Support new staff members to get to know residents to enable positive relationships.
* Be patient and adopt a warm, positive, and friendly approach.
* Use positive facial expressions, verbal encouragement and reassurance.
* Remain calm. People with dementia can mirror our mood and behaviour. If you appear anxious, this may cause the person to feel more anxious.
* Acknowledge feelings, validate emotional experiences, and provide reassurance. (e.g.: “It sounds like you are feeling worried” “It’s okay to be frightened”, “You are safe” “We are here to help you”).

Meaningful activity

* Offer appropriate activities to prevent boredom (e.g. music, jigsaws, looking at photos, etc…)
* Accompany and encourage the resident to participate in activities

If a person with dementia is unable to comply with safety measures

* Try to understand behaviour and provide practical help by breaking things into manageable steps.
* Remind residents of protective measures. Consider supporting verbal communication with pictures.
* Encourage and provide reassurance to promote sense of accomplishment.

Physical discomfort

* People with dementia may not be able to tell you that they feel hot, have a high temperature, or are experiencing discomfort. You may therefore need to regularly check residents’ temperature to actively monitor for possible COVID-19
* Comfort the resident verbally (e.g. “you must be in a lot of pain, let me help you”)
* Refer to appropriate services for treatment of physical conditions and symptom-relief medication.
* For confirmed cases, follow your local guidance on COVID-19 management

**If mood or behaviour deteriorates (e.g. withdrawn, tearful, aggression, etc…)**

* Check for COVID-19 symptoms
* Rule out other underlying physical causes: Check bowels, urine, food and fluid intake, and pain
* Contact GP
* Follow guidance in this document and document behaviours using ABC charts
* **If behaviours persist, contact CHIT Monday-Friday 9am-5pm**