Addressing the emotional needs of individuals with dementia when in hospital

an illustration of how an entire ward staff team understands the emotional needs of people with dementia

**Hospital dementia care**

is an international priority. The research literature contains accounts of patients with dementia being emotionally distressed, which is infrequently understood or addressed. This has important implications for the person’s wellbeing, the challenge for hospital staff, the use of antipsychotic medication and increased healthcare costs.

**Method**

Freelisting interviews were conducted with a full UK hospital ward staff team (n=47). Staff listed: (1) all the ways they notice the emotional distress of patients with dementia, (2) the causes of emotional distress, (3) all the ways they respond and (4) the responses that seem to work. Cultural consensus analysis was applied.

**Aim**

To provide a concise description of achievable emotion-focused care for patients with dementia, from a full multidisciplinary hospital ward staff team.

**Findings**

Behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, such as agitation and increased mobilising, is how hospital staff noticed emotional distress. They understood the underlying causes; the main ones were the unfamiliar hospital environment and not knowing what is happening. The most effective ways to respond to emotional distress required knowing the person, talking and being with the person.

The findings offer a menu of options for providing emotionally-responsive care. Future research should evaluate the care described.

**References**


**Overview**

This study adds to the literature by detailing achievable person-centred care for patients with dementia as described by a full hospital ward of multidisciplinary staff within their routine practice. The solutions are ordered by priority and presented as a menu of possible ways to notice, understand and respond to emotional distress. We recommend that these findings are implemented into care delivery and evaluated because they have the potential to reduce challenging behaviour, the use of antipsychotic medication and healthcare costs.

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