

An unbiased perspective of working in dementia

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At Reed Health & Care, we work with nearly 2,000 health and care professionals on a daily basis. Supplying dementia specialists within the care and support sector, we work closely with care staff to understand their challenges and motivations in their line of work.

We reached out to our workforce of over 300 dementia experts and asked them to discuss their experiences of working with dementia patients, the challenges they face, their experience of patient outcomes and the most creative and engaging initiatives they have implemented or seen in practice.

These findings provide an unbiased perspective of working with dementia from those on the front line of delivering care. Unless stated otherwise, all findings are from this survey.

464,227

Total number of people in the UK with a dementia diagnosis.¹

4x

In England and Wales, the number of people living with dementia who need palliative care will almost quadruple by 2040.²

Over 50%

of the UK public has been affected by dementia.³



Biggest challenges facing those working in dementia care



of care professionals surveyed believe that the biggest challenge they face is working with multiple and complex emotions (fear, aggression and confusion).



of care professionals surveyed thought that medication management was the most challenging aspect of working with dementia patients.

Knowing how to confidently support service users with dementia through episodes of fear, aggression and confusion helps deliver best practice care.

In ideal circumstances, the care worker will know how each individual is best supported by consistently working with them, having been well trained, knowing the care plan thoroughly and being supported by colleagues.

Working out the best techniques to support those with dementia takes time, practice and patience. Identifying triggers

and communicating this as part of the care plan can help enormously.

Our care workers are conscious that they also have a responsibility to support the families of those with dementia with their emotional responses. Care workers can learn from the family in order to support the patient better and the family members can learn from the care worker.



Quotes from the experts

“ Even though we had assessments in place, suitable placements and PRN medication, it was still the behaviours that needed to be managed. ”

“ There’s no real answer in helping them as emotions are uncontrollable and unpredictable. ”

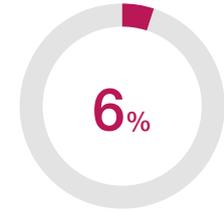
Efficacy of dementia training



One in four care professionals surveyed said that patience and communication were key skills they learned during their dementia training.



of care professionals surveyed said that an understanding of dementia and how to empathise with patients were valuable skills they learned.



of care professionals surveyed said that they had received no formal training, but most had personal or previous experience.

Nearly a quarter of our surveyed experts said that patience was a key skill they learned from their dementia training. But it's only when services have enough staff that care professionals have the time to demonstrate patience effectively.

Dementia services need to set the standards to be met but there is also a huge amount of shared learning that goes on between carers, family members, patients, occupational therapists and social workers. The more opportunities for sharing best practice and creative ideas the better.

Our carers are avid to receive more frequent training in addition to more training on the legal implications surrounding dementia care, including the Mental Health Capacity Act 2005. Additionally, a lot of carers would like more person-centred training, bespoke to the individual, and training on the different types of dementia so they can better support the patient and their families.



Quotes from the experts

“ It is easy to see a patient in front of you who's an 80 year old, frail man, trying to climb out of bed, getting aggressive with nothing on their feet; but not the war veteran that they truly are. ”

“ A smile works, it goes a long way. They can't recognise anyone, but if you smile they see you mean no harm. ”

Engaging and creative initiatives



**Memory boxes/
books**



Music therapy



Colour coding



**Labelling of
objects**



Animal therapy



**Nurseries in/next
to care homes**

These are the initiatives that stood out as the most creative and engaging to most of our dementia experts. Reminiscence work that includes photographs, music therapy and memory boxes can trigger an emotional response and help patients remember their past. This is also something that families can engage with, promoting an inclusive care plan.

Colour coding doors has shown to be beneficial in care homes, helping patients differentiate the rooms. Similarly, labelling objects (such as kitchen appliances) promotes independence.

Animal therapy interventions have been shown to have a strong positive effect on the social behaviours of dementia patients, as well as increasing physical activity, and improving dietary intake and quality of life.⁵

Quotes from the experts

“ Try and get their care home room to look like the home they moved from, ensuring regular family contact. Put their pictures of them, their spouse, children or pets at the entrance of their room so they can identify their room. ”

“ At a dementia village, there were bus stops outside all the homes so that the dementia sufferer didn't leave the site; they would just wait at the bus stop. ”

“ A day service had a sensory and reminiscence room that looked like it was from the 70s. ”

“ If someone gets up at night and begins to wander, then a sensor detects them moving and a recording of their spouse's voice plays 'go back to bed dear'. They hear a loved one ushering them back to bed and so they will do so. ”

“ Virtual reality headsets so they could experience new places they're not going to be able to visit. ”

“ A dementia clock that shows the sun and moon, so patients wake up and know the time of day. ”



Environmental influence on outcomes for patients



of care professionals surveyed believe that being at home in familiar surroundings that are safe and appropriate offers the best outcome for patients.



of the remaining care professionals surveyed believe that specialist villages, nursing homes or access to day services offer the best outcomes.



of those who believe being at home offers the best outcome, expressed the need to base suitability of environment on the stage and severity of diagnosis.

2 in 5

of those who believe being at home offers the best outcome, suggest that the familiarity element is key when caring for dementia patients at home.

Many of our dementia specialists have to make recommendations about whether patients can remain in their own home or need to move to a different environment for their own safety and well-being. As long as it is safe and appropriate, our care workers felt that those with dementia have better outcomes in their home environment.

Remaining in their homes generally makes the patient feel safer and more comfortable. Often the unfamiliar surroundings of a care home or specialist village can cause anxiety and confusion. Some specialists even feel that they see a deterioration when the patient is moved from their home.

Although preferable, it is not always possible for people to stay at home if they live alone or have no family support network. Families can also struggle to adequately support the needs and behaviours of the individual. In these instances, care homes and other specialist care facilities can offer up to 24/7 care which is essential for some dementia patients. They can provide a sense of community and promote engagement in activities that the patient may not have access to otherwise.

Quotes from the experts

“ Home is known and comfortable. Dignified. ”

“ Not everyone can tolerate a care home, there are lots of people and it's noisy. Being at home, carers can come morning and evening. Families can be involved, too. ”

“ Having access to specialist day services means a break for both family and patients and allows patients to be in a familiar environment when they go home in the evenings and mornings, which are often their most difficult times. ”

What if you had dementia? Important traits people want from a carer



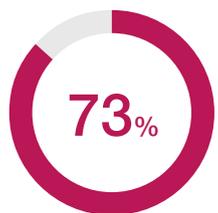
of care professionals surveyed said that one of the most important things they would want from a carer is patience and reassurance.



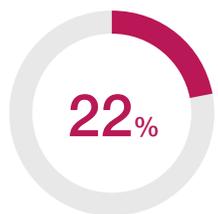
of care professionals surveyed think that their carer having an understanding of their illness is one of the most important traits.



of care professionals said that help, encouragement and support of their independence, rather than solely caring for them, is one of the most important things they would want from a carer.



of the UK public said they would want to be told by a doctor their own personal risk of developing dementia.⁴



However, only 22% of care professionals surveyed included honesty about their care and diagnosis as one of the most important things they would want from a carer if they had dementia.

What if you had dementia? This was quite a personal question which made the answers very interesting. We want patience and reassurance from our carers. We want support to remain independent and an understanding of dementia.

Promotion of our independence supports the idea that most of our carers believe that encouraging people to remain in their own homes can offer the best outcomes for patients.

Having an understanding of their illness is an extremely important trait that people would want in their carer. This also supports the need for thorough and frequent training.

A great deal can be learnt and trained, including techniques for patience. Even learning to put yourself in the shoes of the patient can be trained. However, choosing to put all the training in to practice comes down to the motivation of the carer and the culture of the environment that they work in.

Good practice promotes better practice. Where the patients are looked after in a learning environment; their outcomes are better.



Sources

1. NHS (2019) Recorded Dementia Diagnoses – February 2019
2. Etkind et al (2017) How many people will need palliative care in 2040? Past trends, future projections and implications for services
3. Dementia Statistics (2018) Public attitudes towards dementia.
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5. M. L. Yakimicki (2018) Animal-assisted Intervention and Dementia: A Systematic Review.



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