

How to identify dementia

A guide for care assistants working in social care

People who have dementia have a right to know they have it...

It is important that we recognise that everyone has a right to know if they have dementia.

You may be supporting people who have dementia, but who've never received a diagnosis. Some reasons why they should receive a diagnosis are:

- so that they can receive additional healthcare support such as slowing the progression of the condition
- so their care and support needs can be better met
- so that community services and facilities can better support the person
- so that the person and their family can make arrangements such as financial and legal planning, as well as life story work to ensure their care and support needs are met as the progression of the condition occurs.

Much has changed to address the stigma of dementia in society over the past few years; however this needs to be acknowledged as something that affects different individuals and their families in different ways.

Do you know what you should be looking out for?

In case you are not sure, the signs and symptoms of dementia vary, however the common things to look out for are:

- loss or lapses of recent memory
- mood changes or uncharacteristic behaviour (in later stages this will become more pronounced)
- poor concentration
- problems communicating
- getting lost in familiar places
- making mistakes in a previously learned skill
- problems telling the time or using money
- changes in sleep patterns and appetite
- personality changes
- the brain doesn't process images as normal.

What should you do if you suspect someone may have dementia?

You may wish to have a sensitive discussion with the individual (if possible), their family and your colleagues about the problems that the person has been experiencing and encouraging them to see their GP.

- If an individual lacks capacity or needs additional support, you should speak to the family and their GP.
- Some GPs are able to make a dementia diagnosis, or they will make a referral to a memory clinic if this is more appropriate if they suspect the person has dementia.
- As GP services are NHS services they should be free for people who have dementia, or are suspected of having dementia.
- If a GP feels that a formal diagnosis is not necessary, you may need to support the person or highlight your own concerns about the difficulties that the person has been experiencing and also mention the benefits that diagnosis can bring.
- If you still have concerns it may be worth seeking the views of another primary care professional.

For more information and resources visit our webpage www.skillsforcare.org.uk/dementia.

