

Delirium

Patient Information Leaflet

“Betty, a lady who had been admitted to hospital with a broken hip, had been fully independent in her own home. A few days after surgery to repair her hip she became agitated and disorientated. When the nurses went to assist her with personal care or offer her drinks, she shouted and swore, believing that they were going to hurt and poison her.

Betty was experiencing a delirium - sometimes called ‘acute confusional state’.”

What is Delirium?

Delirium is a state of mental confusion that can happen if you become unwell. It is also known as an “acute confusional state”. Illness, surgery and medications can all cause delirium. It often starts suddenly, but usually improves when the condition causing it gets better. It can be frightening - not only for the person who is unwell, but also for those around them.

Signs of Delirium

- Restlessness.
- Anxiety.
- Poor concentration.
- Confusion.
- Vivid dreams.
- Shouting.
- Drowsiness.
- Hallucinations.
- Disorientation.
- Fear.

- Inability to recognise familiar faces.
- Aggression.
- Paranoid thoughts.

A person with delirium will experience one or more of these symptoms. Sometimes these symptoms can appear worse in the evening or at night.

Who can develop Delirium?

- People with memory problems.
- Older patients - particularly those who are physically frail.
- Patients who are constipated.
- Patients who are dehydrated.
- Patients who have an infection (e.g. urinary infection or chest infection) .
- Patients with poor hearing or eye sight.
- Patients who take excessive amounts of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Patients taking many medications - particularly sleeping tablets.
- Patients with neurological conditions - such as Parkinsons, Epilepsy or Stroke.
- Patients who are severely ill.
- Patients who have had recent surgery - particularly hip surgery.
- Patients who are nearing the end of their life.

Having a delirium can be a very distressing and frightening time for both patients and their family.

If you notice any changes in your relative, please tell a member of staff.

What can you do to help?

- Bring daily newspapers.
- Bring snacks and help at mealtimes.

- Bring photos and familiar mementoes for reassurance.
- Opt to join the **Butterfly Scheme**, a discreet way to ensure the person with delirium is safe and cared for in a person-centred way.
- Consider being part of John's Campaign where family and carers are encouraged to stay with the person with dementia/cognitive impairment/delirium. They are welcome to support the planning, care decisions, and delivery of person-centred care for the person, whilst being their advocate too.
- We ask our patient's family and friends to complete a **Forget Me Not passport**. It asks simple questions such as: likes and dislikes, what scares them, what do they like doing.



What staff will do to help

- Maintain daytime routine and mobility
- Support with fluids where necessary
- Avoid constipation
- Look for signs of pain and treat
- Assist with sensory losses - hearing aids, glasses, teeth
- Avoid unnecessary moves around wards and hospitals
- Review medication
- Avoid sedation but may be necessary for safety of patient or others
- Look for cause of delirium and treat where possible

In 20% of cases of delirium no cause is found and mainstay of treatment is support and time.

Delirium usually resolves within a week but some cases can be fluctuant and take months to resolve. Some never recover and the patient may be discharged with residual symptoms.

More information can be obtained from The Dementia and Care of the Elderly Team at:

FGH Tel: 07815 003 764

or

RLI Tel: 07815 003 765

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Other formats

If you would like to receive this information in an alternative format, then please contact : 01539 795497.

Travelling to our hospitals

For the best way to plan your journey visit our website:
<http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): 01539 795497.

Useful Contact Details

NHS 111 (for 24 hour urgent health advice): telephone 111

Your Information

If you would like to know how we use, share, disclose and secure your information and your rights of access to the information we hold about you, visit the Trust's website: <http://www.UHMB.nhs.uk/> or contact Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01539 795497.

Evidence

Details of the evidence used in writing this leaflet are available on request from: Patient Information Officer at 01524 512476.

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment, please speak to a member of staff or contact PALS on 01539 795497.

UHMBT is a no smoking Trust. Smoking is not permitted on any of the hospital sites. You can contact the NHS North Lancashire Stop Smoking services on the number below:

NHS Quit Squad - **0800 328 6297**

If you live in Cumbria, please call **0300 013 3000** to find a local pharmacy who are offers 1-2-1 support and nicotine replacement therapy.

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