



Dementia Friendly Hospitals

Hospitals play a vital role in providing safe, compassionate and person-centered care for people living with dementia. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that hospital teams can take to provide supportive and accessible experiences for patients and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, improve the care environment and support patient comfort and safety.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a general term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication and decision-making in ways that interfere with daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In hospitals, dementia symptoms may intensify due to noise, bright lights or frequent changes in staff and routines.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff including environmental services, dietary and security staff through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Integrate dementia education into new staff orientation, annual competencies and professional development across departments. Include training on delirium prevention, cognitive screening and non-drug behavioral strategies.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Say the person's name, make eye contact and face them directly.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, friendly tone of voice. Be calm, positive and respectful.

Smile and be kind. Friendly expressions help the person feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, like yes/no or "Would you like to sit by the bed or near the window?"

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.

Repeat or rephrase if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Reduce distractions. Minimize background noise so it is easier to focus.

Observe nonverbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, distress or fatigue and respond calmly to maintain comfort and safety.

Use visual or written cues. Reinforce information with gestures, demonstrations or brief notes to support understanding and recall.

Share information with both patient and care partner. Provide instructions and care plans verbally and in writing so key details are remembered after discharge.

Equip staff with reminders. Provide pocket cards to reinforce clear, respectful communication.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g., restrooms, exits, exam rooms) placed at eye level to guide people.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned floors that can cause glare or confusion and mark stairs or ramps with bright, high-contrast tape or paint. Remove clutter, cords and unused equipment.

Keep lighting bright and even in all areas, especially hallways and restrooms. Reduce glare and shadows to help people see clearly and feel safe moving around.

Provide comfortable, stable seating that is easy to get in and out of. Place sturdy chairs with armrests in hallways, waiting areas, near entrances and exits.

Make restrooms easy to find and safe to use. Post clear signs and maintain bright, even lighting. Install grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms when possible.

Support orientation. Post large clocks and calendars in visible areas and label rooms or units clearly when allowed.

Reduce noise and overstimulation. Lower paging and alarm volumes, close doors gently and keep voices soft near patient areas.

Allow familiar personal items. Encourage families to bring small items like photos or blankets for comfort.

PERSON-CENTERED AND SAFE DEMENTIA CARE

Use simple language, eye contact and gentle tone; offer reassurance and familiar items or quiet spaces when the person is anxious or confused.

Address pain, hunger, toileting, temperature or noise before considering medications or interventions.

Use available orientation cues—clocks, calendars and signage—to remind patients of time, place and purpose during care interactions.

Support regular meals, fluids, short walks and rest periods to prevent delirium and maintain function.

Keep the same caregivers when possible and minimize unnecessary room or unit transfers.

Apply the Age-Friendly Health System 4Ms Framework.

SUPPORT FAMILIES AND CARE PARTNERS

Greet family and care partners warmly, include them in conversation and recognize them as part of the care team.

Invite families to share the patient's preferred name, routines, interests and triggers to help staff tailor communication and comfort.

Provide brief printed or verbal explanations about dementia, delirium prevention and how families can help with orientation and comfort.

Allow care partners to visit or assist during meals, therapy or rest periods to reduce confusion and support continuity.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer's Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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