***WILLOWBROOK HOSPICE Patient Support***

**We are available to give support to relatives and carers during this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to speak with the staff on duty if you need support or wish to discuss any of the information provided in this leaflet.**

**Delirium**

Information for patients and those important to them

**Your comments matter**

In the event that you have any comments or concerns about our services, we would ask you in the first instance to approach the Senior Nurse on duty, or if you would prefer, please contact a member of the Management Team.

If you have any queries or concerns at any stage please contact:

Main switchboard telephone:

E-mail:

Website:



Delirium: Information for patients and those important to them by Powell, Monnery & Schofield. Willowbrook Hospice, UK is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

April 2018

**What is Delirium?**

 Delirium is an episode of confusion that may develop over a period of hours or days. Delirium is usually due to a physical illness and is different to the confusion that occurs in people who have conditions such as dementia, which can develop slowly over years.

 We know that delirium is common in people who are extremely unwell and may be nearing the end of their lives.

**Symptoms of Delirium?**

As well as confusion, the person with delirium may experience a number of other symptoms including:

* Agitation and restlessness
* Increased drowsiness in the day
* Disturbed sleep at night
* Hallucinations (seeing things or hearing imaginary things)
* Delusions (false beliefs)
* Poor concentration
* Reduced ability to move about or look after oneself
* New or increased fears and anxieties
* Low mood and lack of interest
* Change in personality

The symptoms of delirium can fluctuate throughout the day and night. For instance, many people experience worsening confusion and other symptoms towards the evening and at night.

**Why do people experience Delirium?**

A person who is very ill may have a number of reasons for developing delirium. In many cases there is no single reason and it may be a combination of some of the causes listed below combined with the fact that they are becoming increasingly unwell due to their underlying illness:

* Infection
* Certain medications such as some pain-killers
* Problems with the heart, lungs or kidneys
* Changes to the blood chemistry
* Constipation
* Difficulties emptying the bladder
* Poor fluid intake
* Withdrawal from certain medications or other substances such as alcohol or nicotine

The clinical team looking after the person experiencing delirium will make careful assessments of them to identify and treat these potential causes. Even if a reason is suspected or found it may not always be possible to treat this effectively in a person felt to be in the last hours or days of their life. This will always be discussed with the person, if possible, and / or those important to them.

 ***Patient Support Information LEAFLET***

******

**How can we treat or improve the symptoms of Delirium?**

Looking for and treating any causes of the delirium will be an important aspect of treatment. This may not always be possible, however, there are many things we can do that may help reduce the symptoms of delirium. Simple changes that do not involve medications will always be tried first. These approaches, listed below, can often be made most effective by involving the person experiencing delirium and those important to them.

* Regular contact with familiar people is very important in order to help the person feel calm and orientated.
* A suitably lit environment
* Access to calendars and clocks
* Relieving boredom i.e. keeping up with known enjoyable activities such as reading, crosswords, drawing, radio and TV programmes, familiar music
* Ensuring hearing aids/spectacles are present and working
* Maintaining normal sleeping patterns i.e. awake during the day and sleeping at night (if appropriate for the individual).
* Calm reassurance if agitation and restlessness are present.

These steps may be all that is needed to improve the state of delirium. However, Should the symptoms continue to be distressing the clinical team will consider the use of medications to help relieve such symptoms as hallucinations, restlessness or agitation. The lowest doses needed to help control the symptoms will be used. Sometimes it is not possible to fully control the symptoms of delirium.

**Coping with Delirium**

Delirium can be very frightening both for the person affected and for those important to them.

If you are a relative, friend or carer of a person experiencing delirium it may be very upsetting to see changes in a loved one’s personality or to see them agitated and confused. At this time it is very common to experience a number of different emotions such as fear, sadness and anger. Please make contact with the clinical team looking after your loved one if you feel this way. You may require advice or on-going help and support during this difficult time.

