Volume XXV

Dementia in Long-Term Care:
Communicating with Residents

A VIDEO GUIDE FOR EMPLOYING BREAKTHROUGHS IN CARE GIVING
COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH DEMENTIA IN LONG-TERM CARE SETTINGS

Up to half of all long-term care residents suffer from some form of dementia, such as Alzheimer’s disease. Their caregivers face many special challenges. Chief among them is properly communicating with residents with dementia in order to meet all of their care giving needs. Caregivers can help by understanding residents’ capabilities and limitations, then using that knowledge to help provide individualized care.

Caring for your residents is your top priority. Residents and their families trust you to help protect them and their health. Understanding the impact dementia can have on residents’ ability to communicate will help you to be proactive in using strategies for bridging communication problems and anticipating resident needs. Above all, being educated and informed can help you make sure your residents receive the best possible care.

This facilitator’s guide will help you plan for and conduct sessions to help ensure that you maximize the material in this video. Consider your facility’s protocol for addressing the needs of residents with dementia, and consider topics to engage in meaningful discussion regarding dementia.

This program will focus on defining the unique communication issues facing long-term care residents with dementia, guidelines for communicating, and both verbal and non-verbal techniques that primary caregivers can use to help residents maintain their quality of life.
VIEWING GUIDELINES

“Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents” is a video-based learning program. It supports the needs and motivations of health care professionals and staff that provide direct resident care. Conduct learning sessions for:

- All CNAs
- All RNs
- All newly hired CNAs and RNs

“Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents” can positively influence care giving by helping you:

- Understand the communication difficulties you may face when caring for residents with dementia
- Utilize various communication strategies for dealing with residents with varying degrees of dementia
- Help residents care maintain their overall quality of life despite their degenerative condition

PROGRAM CONTENT

“Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents” is a practical educational tool. It demonstrates important skills necessary to help caregivers address the communication deficiencies of residents. Filled with practical information and useful instruction, this video explains prevention measures for overcoming communication difficulties with residents suffering from dementia, and so much more.

This video training provides a unique and interactive learning experience. In addition to the valuable learning information contained in the video and accompanying facilitator’s guide, the video in-service provides opportunities for facilitated discussion to help participants understand how dementia can influence communications and overall resident health.
SAMPLE GROUP SESSION AGENDA

Use the following sample agenda to structure a session featuring “Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents”

Length of videotaped program: approximately 25 minutes

Suggested length of session: 1 hour and 40 minutes (including a 10 minute break)

MATERIALS NEEDED

- This facilitator’s guide
- The “Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents” video program
- Optional paper and pencils for participant note-taking
- Optional flipchart and markers for writing key ideas
# SUGGESTED SESSION AGENDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>Welcome the group to your session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Show first module of video program: <em>Introduction</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCE</strong> the “<em>Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents</em>” topic by leading this discussion:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ASK:** In your facility, how common is dementia?

**ASK:** How often do you experience challenges communicating with residents with dementia?

**Review** the learning objectives -- after viewing this program you will be able to:

- Understand the communication difficulties you may face when caring for residents with dementia
- Utilize various communication strategies for dealing with residents with varying degrees of dementia
- Help residents maintain their overall quality of life despite their degenerative condition

**ASK:** How are these learning objectives relevant in your facility?

**DISCUSS** prior knowledge of communication problems when interacting with residents with dementia. Try to understand the group’s prior knowledge so you can help reinforce good practices and change those that are incorrect. (Encourage discussion to help uncover staff knowledge). With this baseline, you can better understand how to focus later discussion and follow-up exercises. You
can also realize how the learning sessions have helped to improve training.

2 min Show first module of video program – *Definitions and Demographics*

10 min Engage viewers in a brief discussion about MODULE 1. If group members are slow to respond, consider briefly recapping the main ideas emphasized in the first module (or the key situations and behaviors with which you feel your group can most easily relate).

ASK: Do any of your residents with dementia suffer memory loss? Do they exhibit any of the other impairments described in the video (inability to control behavior, decreased learning ability, difficulties communicating)? How does this affect their quality of life? How does it affect the level of care you provide?

ASK: Are there any strategies and protocols in place at your facility for recognizing residents with communication difficulties? If so, what are they? If not, do you find yourself addressing communication issues in any other way?

DISCUSS the consequences of communication problems associated with dementia on the level of care and quality of life at the participants’ facility. Encourage participants to talk about some of the problems that they witness in their residents with dementia. Discuss their role in communication strategy and how that role can either be expanded or altered to better suit the needs of the residents under their care.

4 min Show second module of video program – *Dementia Associated Communication Problems*

15 min Engage viewers in a brief discussion about MODULE 2. If group members are slow to respond, consider briefly recapping the main ideas emphasized in the second module
(or the key situations and behaviors with which you feel your group can most easily relate).

**DISCUSS** the participants’ views on the effectiveness of their facility’s protocols for communication deficiencies for residents with dementia. What would they change? Offer suggestions to improve the care provided to their residents?

**ASK:** Have you had any positive or negative experiences interacting with residents with dementia? What do you think was the difference between the negative or positive outcome? In the case of the negative experience, what stood in your way? What prevented a positive outcome?

**DISCUSS** the specific difficulties that residents with dementia face when trying to communicate with their caregivers. How do each of these elements interfere with your ability to provide adequate care?

- Slowed thinking
- Memory loss
- Inability to process information
- Difficulty finding the right words
- Problems recognizing how the world works

**ASK:** Do you get frustrated with your residents with dementia because of your inability to get through to them? What do you do to overcome this frustration? What could you do better?

6 min    Show third module of video program – *Communication Guidelines*

15 min    Engage viewers in a brief discussion about MODULE 3. If group members are slow to respond, consider briefly recapping the main ideas emphasized in the third module (or the key situations and behaviors with which you feel your group can most easily relate).
**ASK:** Do any of you or your residents with dementia speak a language other than English? If so, how is this handled at your facility? Do you encounter any difficulties because of this? Do you have translators on staff who can properly communicate with the resident? How do you think your facility can better bridge the divide between languages?

**ASK:** Do you find your facility to be a loud or distracting environment? What can you do to decrease the level of noise and confusion when you attempt to communicate with a resident with dementia?

**DISCUSS** any of the participants’ attempts to give instruction or direction to a resident with dementia.

**DISCUSS** successes and failures. What did you do that made a specific encounter a success? What do you think you did that contributed to the failure of a specific encounter? What could you have done differently?

**ASK:** Do you use yes or no questioning as a strategy for dealing with residents with dementia? If so, how successful have you been getting at the underlying questions and needs of your residents? If not, do you see any positive outcomes from using such a strategy?

**ASK:** How do the communication guidelines suggested in the training video differ from those that caregivers use at your facility?

**ASK:** What communication methods do you use to assist residents with poor hearing, eyesight, or memory to make sure that they can see, hear and understand you? Do you think that the suggestions described in the video can improve success during encounters with your residents with dementia?

**DISCUSS** the use of positive wording when interacting with residents with dementia. How does staying calm, keeping your cool, and respecting the feelings of others improve the
overall atmosphere at your facility? How does it impact the quality of care you provide to your residents?

2 min  Show fourth module of video program – *Non-verbal Communication*

15 min  Engage viewers in a brief discussion about MODULE 4. If group members are slow to respond, consider briefly recapping the main ideas emphasized in the fourth module (or the key situations and behaviors with which you feel your group can most easily relate).

**DISCUSS** the importance of utilizing non-verbal communication with residents who may have lost the ability to speak. How do caregivers provide for the underlying care needs of their residents in later stages of dementia?

**ASK:** What types of non-verbal communication do you currently use with residents? How successful are you in getting to the underlying needs of those residents?

**ASK:** What types of non-verbal communication do you perceive from those same residents with late stage dementia, who cannot speak? How successful have you been in discerning their meaning and intentions?

**DISCUSS** the participants’ successes and failures in dealing with residents who can no longer speak or properly process information. What role do they take in the care process? How do you share these issues and insights with other members of the staff?

10 min  **BREAK**

1 min  Welcome the group back from the break.

12 min  Show fifth module of video program – *Communication Techniques*
Engage viewers in a brief discussion about MODULE 5. If group members are slow to respond, consider briefly recapping the main ideas emphasized in the fifth module (or the key situations and behaviors with which you feel your group can most easily relate).

**DISCUSS** any situations the participants have encountered that may have improved by focusing on yes/no questioning. How could the situation have been different? How could you have honed in on the underlying issues affecting the resident?

**ASK:** Do you have trouble communicating verbal instructions to residents with dementia? Discuss and give examples. How could these situations be improved by focusing on short, simple steps? Do you think this could help you avoid any problems or misunderstandings? If so, how?

**DISCUSS** the importance of physical cues or gestures when communicating with residents with decreased cognitive abilities. Share examples where you were unable to get through to a resident using verbal communication, but were able to model behavior or connect with a resident using body language? How can this practice be replicated and codified for future use within your facility?

**ASK:** Do you find yourself trying to finish your residents’ sentences? How does that make them feel? Have you experienced any emotional or behavioral outbursts following such an interaction? What could you have done differently to avoid or improve the situation?

**ASK:** When working with residents with decreased communication skills, how do you get to any underlying needs or issues that they may be having? Do you think any of the elements discussed in this training could assist you in the future? If so, what? If not, why not?

**ASK:** Have you had any experiences with residents who became paranoid as a result of their dementia?
ever found yourself arguing with a resident as a result? If so, how did the situation play out? What could you have done differently to improve the outcome of the interaction? Would redirecting the conversation have positively or negatively impacted the direction of the situation?

**DISCUSS** the strategy for dealing with a resident who becomes offensive or aggressive. What protocols are in place at your facility for dealing with residents in these types of situations? How can the communication techniques described in this training help you overcome these difficult situations?

1 min    Show *Conclusion* of video

5 min    In closing:

*ASK* for questions or additional comments from the group.

**DISCUSS** as appropriate.

Thank group members for their participation and conclude the session.
EXERCISES AFTER VIDEO

1 How do you rate our current success in providing information regarding the communication difficulties of long-term care residents with dementia? How do residents rate our success?

2 What are some examples you’ve seen in just the last week or two of:
   -- Problems communicating with residents at your facility with dementia
   -- Specific communication deficiencies affecting residents with different and varying degrees of dementia
   -- Successes using verbal and non-verbal techniques to better communicate with and provide adequate care to residents with dementia

3 What can you do to help yourself and other members of the staff better understand the communication difficulties that can come between residents with dementia and their caregivers? What strategies do you use at your facility to overcome these issues to provide the best care and safeguard resident health and quality of life?

Suggest that participants accept a follow-up assignment, as a proactive step in improving their understanding of how to deal with the unique communication needs of residents with dementia.

For example, participants might be asked to identify a resident at their facility who has difficulty communicating due to the presence of dementia. Ask them to note how changes in their body or behavior are addressed to overcome these obstacles while still providing quality care. Participants could also track the success of verbal and non-verbal strategies used with those residents. What was done at the care planning stage? On the frontline?

Then, hold a second meeting and ask each staff member to share what they have learned or any successes they have witnessed.

Finally, as a group, establish a series of recommendations outlining how to best improve the care of residents with dementia with associated communication problems.
Questions?

If you have any questions about how to implement the “Dementia in Long-Term Care: Communicating with Residents” program, or if you would like information about other programs available from ElderCare Communications, call or write:

ElderCare Communications
680 Northland Blvd., Building C
Cincinnati, OH 45240

Phone: 800-505-3232    Fax: 513-742-6269

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