

BERRYS SOLICITORS

Dementia Guide

A practical guide to help you.....



What is Dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe a collection of symptoms including a memory loss, mood changes and problems with reasoning and communication skills. These symptoms occur when the brain is affected by certain diseases or conditions.

It mainly affects people over 65 (but symptoms in younger people shouldn't be ignored), and the likelihood of developing it increases with age. It is progressive, and each person experiences it in their own way. How it progress depends on the individual person and what type of dementia they have. While there are drugs that can slow the progress of dementia, there is currently no cure.

There are many different types of dementia. The most common ones are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. The most common early sign is a loss of short-term memory – someone may forget things they've said or done that day, even though they can clearly recall events that happened years ago.

Dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing. Being forgetful doesn't necessarily mean someone has dementia. Dementia like symptoms can be caused by depression, stress, vitamin deficiencies, thyroid problems or urinary tract infections. If you're worried about someone, don't jump to conclusions: get professional help and advice from your doctor.

Talking to your GP

The thought that someone you care about might have dementia can be scary. But facing up to your fears is usually much better than trying to ignore the problem. A diagnosis won't make the condition worse, and knowing what's wrong can help you access help, support, services and medication if appropriate, as well as plan ahead.

If memory problems are beginning to have an impact on day-to-day life, you could visit the GP together to explain your concerns. Be patient but persistent, and talk about the impact the symptoms are having.

The GP may make a referral to a specialist or a memory clinic for a fuller assessment. Memory clinics offer ongoing assessments, support and advice for those with memory problems and their carers. Or they may refer you to a community mental health team for advice and support. The person you care for is entitled to a referral, so request one if the GP doesn't suggest it.

Sorting out legal affairs

Making decisions about their future while they still have mental capacity (the ability to reliably make decisions for themselves) can help someone with dementia remain in control and feel more confident about their care and support. As their carer, you can feel reassured that a plan is in place for when things change.

Wills

Talk to the person with dementia about making a will or reviewing their existing will to ensure it still reflects their wishes.

Lasting Power of Attorney

The person with dementia may wish to set up a lasting power of attorney (LPA) so that a responsible person (known as an 'attorney') can make decisions on their behalf. There are two types of LPA, one covering health and care decisions and the other covering property and financial matters. The health and care LPA can only be used when someone has lost mental capacity (meaning they no longer have the ability to make their own decisions), while the property and financial LPA can be used immediately. An LPA must be registered with the Office of the Public Guardian before it can be used, a process which takes up to eight weeks. If the person with dementia loses mental capacity having already signed the LPA, their attorney can still register it.

Advance decision to refuse treatment

An advance decision lets someone decide to refuse certain types of medical treatment in certain situations, should they lack capacity to make or communicate the decision in the future. It is legally binding and must be followed by doctors and health care professionals.

And advance statement allows someone to record how they would like to be treated. It isn't legally binding but should be taken into account by health and social care professionals.

Applying for deputyship

If the person you care has already lost the ability to make or communicate decisions but doesn't have an LPA, you can apply to the Court of Protection. They can either make decisions on behalf of that person or appoint someone else (called a deputy) to do so. Get an LPA in place if you can, as applying to be deputy can be more expensive and time consuming.

What should I do now?

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