

## How to support people with dementia to tolerate 'Personal Protective Equipment' (during the COVID-19 pandemic)

- During the COVID-19 pandemic medical, care and mental health professionals may need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as aprons, gloves and masks more often than before, especially when completing personal care with individuals who have a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.
- This could obviously be quite disorientating and potentially scary for a person living with dementia, especially if they have some level of cognitive impairment, and have not seen such PPE before or have not seen a professional wearing such attire.
- It is worth imagining how it would feel if someone came into your room first thing in the morning wearing PPE equipment.
- For individuals who may already find personal care/self-care interventions difficult to tolerate, the introduction of PPE equipment is likely to exacerbate this distress. Unfortunately it will also make it more difficult for the individual with dementia to recognise carers that they are possibly familiar with, further exacerbating their distress. Additionally, if there is a lot of staff sickness within the team who usually look after the person living with dementia, 'new' members of staff may have to attend to the person living with dementia's needs, again risking further distress.
- Here are some suggestions as to how you can reduce such PPE-related distress in people living with dementia;
  - Ensure all new staff or bank staff **familiarise themselves with care plans** before attempting to assist, even where time is limited.
  - **Buddy up** experienced staff with less experienced staff to ensure continuity of approach, particularly for individuals living with dementia who find personal care difficult.

- **Prepare everything** you need in advance of the task you are completing to minimise the time spent in the equipment, or preparing the equipment in front of the person living with dementia.
- To support the person living with dementia to recognise you and/or understand who you are you may wish to **write your name and role on your PPE gown/clothing** (staff on intensive care wards are doing this).
- Before you go in to see the person living with dementia, **notice how you are feeling**. If you are anxious or scared, the person living with dementia may pick up on your body language or facial expression, and are likely to feel the same. Take a deep breath and try to remain calm, positive and reassuring when you enter.
- **Knock on the person living with dementia's door and enter slowly**, greeting them using their name and introduce yourself with a smile, stating your name and your role (don't assume that they know who you are).
- See how they respond and **allow them to get a good look at you** before approaching them.
- **Acknowledge the mask or specific PPE equipment** you are wearing saying "Sorry I look a bit funny today, I'm wearing this to protect us both from any bugs or germs we might have".
- If you have already spoken to the person living with dementia about COVID-19, and they have retained this, **refer back to this discussion about the virus**.
- Depending on the individual, **you could make a joke about your gear**, "I look like an astronaut" or "Would you wear something like this?"
- If the person living with dementia finds it difficult to understand you with the mask on, **consider using laminated signs with basic information** e.g. 'I'm here to help". Ensure these are appropriately sterilised as per infection control guidance.
- **Use all the skills you would usually to put the person living with dementia at ease**, talk about their family or pictures in their room/house. Hum a tune together or get some relaxing music on in the room. All of these things should help to settle the individual and ensure a sense of connectedness is maintained.