

Scenario: Communication in Care

As dementia progresses, communication can become increasingly difficult. As such, communication aids and alternative methods of communication become more important. This is a role play exercise, where a person with dementia with communication difficulties (i.e., hard of hearing and speech difficulties) presents to a clinic to have their care plan changed.



Aims

The aim of this training scenario is to simulate how communication may be affected in people with dementia, either due to dementia itself or due to sensory impairment.



Learning Objectives

- Participants will gain an appreciation of how sensory limitations (i.e., hearing/speech changes) can influence communication
- Participants will learn about aids/ tools that can help to facilitate communication with people with dementia
- Participants will learn how to respond appropriately to communication barriers when they arise



When to use this scenario

The scenario can be used to simulate any stage of dementia. As it currently stands, the scenario may simulate early - middle stages of dementia. This scenario is suitable for healthcare professionals that care for people with dementia and are familiar with the different areas of support. This scenario is best applied during in-person training.

Equipment



- Role descriptions handout
- Earphones/headphones connected to a mobile
- Notepad/ small whiteboard
- Pens
- Picture exchange communication system (if available)

Downloadable supporting materials



- Slide deck
- Communication information sheet
- Hearing loss information

Facilitation Instructions

Setting Up:



- Set up the room as if it is a clinical environment. Have the person with dementia and informal caregiver (optional) sit opposite the healthcare professional.
- Have the simulation equipment (i.e., earphones) and the communication aids ready for the participants to use (i.e., notepad and pen).
- Give the role description handout to each participant. (Available to download separately on the INTenSE platform.)

Roles include:

1. Person with dementia
2. Healthcare professional
3. Informal caregiver (optional)
4. Observer (optional)



20 minutes

Activity Instructions

This is a role-play exercise that should convey:

- What it is like for a person with dementia to experience communication difficulties
 - How healthcare professionals can provide person-centered care to a person with dementia who have difficulty communicating
1. The person with dementia and their informal caregiver (optional) present to a clinic to meet a healthcare professional and review the current care plan
 2. The care plan is insufficient to meet the needs of the person with dementia that relate to: **(a)** physiotherapy **(b)** speech and language **(c)** fatigue management
 3. The person with dementia's role is to communicate to the professional that they want changes made to their care plan to meet their needs, however, they are hard of hearing and have word-finding difficulties.
 4. It is the person with dementia's role to make the flow of communication difficult and challenging for the professional to obtain the needed information.
 5. The professional's role is to find out what the person with dementia's 3 needs are, and identify and make use of alternative forms of communication, e.g., non-verbal communication and communicational aids.



Group Reflection / Discussion



Following the role-play have a group discussion:

- How did it feel to try and communicate?
- What strategies did you use to communicate?
- Was any behaviour misinterpreted?
- What would have made communication easier?
- How did your communication partner get your attention?
- What behaviours in the healthcare professional were most helpful?

Helpful Tips



If you have a big group of participants, you can assign additional participants as informal carers and observers of the role play and ask these individuals to provide feedback afterwards.

Additional Resources

Alzheimer's UK:

- <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/symptoms/non-verbal-communication-and-dementia>

Picture exchange communication system:

- <https://pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs/>

NHS website on communication and dementia:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/communication-and-dementia/>

Article about communicating with diverse and mixed populations:

- Lam, C. K., Kiser, T. C., Metzler-Sawin, E., Brown, C. A., & Ward, C. L. (2020). Utilizing evidence-based guidelines to develop a language barriers simulation. *Contemporary Nurse*, 56(5-6), 534-539.

