

APPENDIX III

PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

DELIRIUM: ACUTE CONFUSION IN THE OLDER ADULT

WHAT IS DELIRIUM?

Delirium is a sudden change in the way that a person thinks and acts. Their behaviour can often change throughout the day and night. It is important to identify the cause of the delirium and treat the cause as soon as possible. The recovery time may vary from days to sometimes several weeks unless there is a relapse, in which case it may take longer.

WHAT MAY BE SEEN

A major change in the person's behaviour that makes you feel that "this is not the same person that I know". The person may become fearful and anxious when they are delirious. These feelings may cause them to become agitated or to try to "get away". They may have good and bad times. Sudden change in behaviour indicates this is delirium not dementia or depression.

You may see some of the following behaviours:

- May not know the time or where they are.
- May verbalize that they are ill and in hospital, however, may still want to leave to continue with their regular daily activities.
- May be drowsy or sleepy during the day and awake and restless during the night.
- May be agitated and restless or may be less active than usual..
- May see things that are not there (hallucinations).
- May misinterpret sounds and voices around them.
- May say things that may embarrass you, like swearing or yelling.
- May hit, pinch or do other things that they would not normally do.

WHAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO DELIRIUM?

- A change in environment such as hospitalization or relocation.
- Surgery.
- An infection.
- Dehydration.
- Medication.
- Alcohol or drug withdrawal.
- Lack of oxygen to the brain.
- An injury to the brain.

WHAT CAN *YOU* DO TO HELP?

- You know the person the best. Please tell the staff if you see any unusual behaviours.
- Be supportive of the person and consistently tell them this will pass.
- Visit as regularly as possible. Your presence can reduce fear and anxiety. Visiting hours can be changed so someone can be present as much as possible (discuss with staff).
- Bring familiar articles from home such as favourite music, pictures and blanket. (Please note: All electrical equipment must be tested by our hospital technicians before use.)
- Ensure that prescription glasses, hearing aid, and dentures are in good repair and used.
- Work with the staff to establish a regular and a consistent routine.

Please also note: The Simon Fraser Health Region supports a least restraint policy. We do not restrain a person (including bed rails and chair belts) unless all other alternatives have been unsuccessful to assure safety and then only after consultation with staff, physicians and family.

Please feel free to ask to speak to your doctor and/or the health care team if you have any further questions or concerns.

This education material has been developed for you by the
Burnaby Hospital Geriatric Services Program Team

NOTES AND QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO ASK