

The Appointment

Training briefing

The Appointment is a film designed to raise awareness about how it feels to be a person with dementia. It follows an older woman called Barbara as she attends the dentist.

For some this may be an emotional film to watch so it is a good idea to reassure the audience that if they feel uncomfortable they should feel free to leave at any time. You should ensure there will be support for them at the end of the session if they need to talk about the content.

The film lasts approximately 15 minutes and ideally should be watched in its entirety in one showing. When the film has finished please pause for a moment and then ask the audience to reflect on the film and the impact it has had. This should take no more than 5 minutes and is designed so that you get the initial feedback from the participants.

“*Now together explore some of the learning points in more detail.*”

Scene 1

Barbara is having a routine check up with her dentist Dr Chandler. She has been his patient for a long time and he knows her and the other members of her family well. She also knows the dental nurse, Roxanne.

Discussion points

- The familiarity of the surroundings helps Barbara to feel less anxious, what effect might this have on her memory and behaviour?
- What were the signs that Barbara may be having memory problems? How might you be able to recognise the early signs of dementia?

Early Diagnosis

These might include:-

- Reduced interest in normal activities - e.g. not cleaning teeth
- Short term memory issues (forgetting what happened within the last 24 hours, repetition)
- Changes in independence (requires verbal prompts)
- Changes in planning and organisational skills (needs someone to book appointment)
- Becomes irritable more easily and or appears withdrawn/ depressed

Scene 2

Six months have elapsed. We find Barbara at home; the house is untidy with things left out in the kitchen. There are visual clues that she is using strategies to help her to remember. She receives a phone call from an automated reminder service about her dental appointment. This confuses her and she appears anxious. The telephone rings for a second time, this time it is her daughter Anna who also reminds her mother about her impending dental appointment. She arranges to meet her in reception afterwards and advises Barbara to leave the house at 10am. Barbara now watches the clock intently, and then when it chimes it transports her back to memories of being a headteacher.

Discussion points

- The phone call to remind Barbara about her appointment is an automated service which she finds hard to understand - is there another way to remind her?
- What kinds of strategies has Barbara used to help her remember things? What else might be useful?
- How might her family and friends support her?

Scene 3/Scene 4

On her way to the surgery, Barbara is still lost in her thoughts, reminiscing about her time teaching in school. She manages to catch the bus and arrives at the practice early. When she enters the practice the receptionist is indifferent towards Barbara, matter-of-factly informing her that Dr Chandler has retired and that she is due to see the new dentist Dr Sharma. The receptionist gives Barbara a medical history and consent form to fill in. The waiting room is busy with patients and there are practice staff walking around. Barbara starts to feel anxious and confused.

Discussion points

- Think about and reflect on how welcome Barbara felt when she arrived.
- How might the receptionist have handled the situation differently?
- Could the news about the change in ownership of the practice have been dealt with in another way?
- Was Barbara able to fill in the forms?
- What effect might having to wait have on Barbara?

Communication

Be more aware of non-verbal messages, such as facial expressions and body language. You may have to use more physical contact, such as reassuring pats on the arm, or smile as well as speaking. The following tips may improve communication between you and the person with dementia:-

- Use eye contact to look at the person, and encourage them to look at you when either of you are talking.
- Try not to interrupt them, even if you think you know what they're saying.
- Give the person your full attention while they speak.
- Minimise distractions that may get in the way of communication, such as the radio playing loudly.
- Repeat what you heard back to the person and ask if it's accurate, or ask them to repeat what they said.

Scene 5

The background noises grow; Barbara sees a message about check in and travel related pictures on the magazines. She becomes increasingly confused and to make sense of these stimuli she begins to think she is in an airport. So she follows another patient out of the practice, thinking she has a plane to catch. The receptionist sees her leave, follows her onto the street and is able to persuade Barbara to return to the waiting room.

Discussion points

- Could the practice staff have been more aware of Barbara?
- Would a different layout in the waiting room or alternative signage have helped?
- How might you manage other patients with appointments at the same time?

Managing appointments

- When would be the best time of day for the appointment? Later appointments when the practice is less busy might help. Consider what is right for the person with dementia and the members of the dental team.
- Allow extra time if needed.

Scene 6

Once back in the waiting room Roxanne comes to collect Barbara. At last this is someone she recognises but then Roxanne suddenly gets called away and leaves Barbara on her own. The floor surface is dark and slightly shiny. As Barbara looks down it takes on the appearance of a stream, she thinks she is walking with her daughter Anna and she goes back in her memory to a walk by the river many years ago. Roxanne appears and sees Barbara is confused, she spends time with her and then gently guides her into the surgery.

Discussion points

- What impact did the surface of the floor have on Barbara?
- How might Roxanne have dealt with it differently when she left Barbara on her own?

Environment

- Individuals with perceptual difficulties may interpret surfaces differently, for instance a shiny floor may be interpreted as puddles of water which they may then avoid. Patterned carpet may have the same effect.
- Introducing a different coloured strip at the edge of a step or over a threshold aids individuals with these visual-spatial/perceptual difficulties.

Scene 7

Barbara meets Dr Sharma. The surgery looks quite different. The new corporate owners have brought in new uniforms and the surroundings look very clinical and unfamiliar to Barbara. She was unable to complete the paperwork so Dr Sharma now goes over the information. When Barbara was at home we saw her yellow INR book but she has left this at home. This distresses Barbara as she is usually careful to keep this in her handbag.

Discussion points

- What could Dr Sharma do that would help Barbara?

Communication

- Try to remember that the person may not understand what you are trying to do and why.
- Find tactful ways to offer help without seeming to take over.
- Try not to criticise, and try to avoid situations where the person is set up to fail.

Scene 8

The check up now begins; the charting reminds Barbara of children counting. We glimpse Barbara's thoughts and the disorientation she feels lying in the dental chair. Once completed Barbara sits up and Dr Sharma gives her a mirror to hold in order to show her the areas where she needs treatment. Barbara finds seeing her reflection deeply disturbing and this triggers her desire to go home.

Discussion points

- Would Barbara be able to give informed consent?
- What might have triggered Barbara's behaviour?
- Why did seeing her reflection make Barbara react in this way?

Tips for preventing aggressive behaviour:

- If the person with dementia does not seem to be coping well, reduce any demands.
- Wherever possible, explain things calmly and in simple sentences, allowing the person more time to respond.
- Guide or prompt the person, and break tasks down into easily manageable steps, so that they can do as much as possible for themselves.
- Try to hide any irritation that you may feel. Focus on the things that the person can still do, rather than what is no longer possible.
- Watch out for warning signs, such as anxious or agitated behaviour or restlessness, and take action immediately to help the person feel more calm and reassured.

Scene 9

Roxanne rescues the situation. The knowledge that Anna is here to take her home calms Barbara down. Barbara seems lucid again and is sorry for the way she has behaved.

Discussion points

- What impact did knowing Anna had arrived have on Barbara?
- How else might Anna be involved?

It is vital to get relatives and carers on board as they can help the person with dementia cope with visiting the dental practice. Showing a carer how to support the oral health of the person they look after can mean that effective mouth care can be continued if the person with dementia is no longer able to do this. It is also important to give consideration to the carer if they need an appointment for themselves (i.e. how can they safely leave their relative with dementia).

Use a whole team approach and promote effective communication in the dental practice to support the person with dementia. It can be stressful to treat people with dementia so it is also important to build supportive relationships within the team so that issues can be raised and problems shared.

The Appointment Reflective learning

1. What have you learned from watching this film?

(Please try to identify at least 3 new pieces of information that you have learnt)

- 1
- 2
- 3

2. How may your practice now change?

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3. What other actions may you take?

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4. Have any training/ further learning needs been identified?

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5. How much do you agree with the following statement? (Please circle your answer)

I now feel more confident about treating patients with Dementia

strongly agree neither agree or disagree strongly disagree

6. Any further comments

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