

Supporting residents with dementia who walk around during coronavirus



As the world faces the unprecedented challenge presented by the Covid-19 virus pandemic, people living with dementia face the greatest threat, 700,000 of whom are likely to be self isolating. You may find that your residents with dementia still want to leave their homes and schemes, which raises concerns about their safety from coronavirus. There are a lot of reasons why people may walk about, including: continuing a habit, relieving boredom, using up energy, relieving pain or feeling anxious. It's important to look for triggers that might cause a person to want to go out, look at helping meet any unmet needs, and considering ways to keep them safe if they do go for a walk.

A lot of the advice on what to do when a person keeps wanting to leave their home in normal circumstances is still true during the current pandemic:

- **Look for any triggers, unmet needs or underlying reasons** for the person wanting to leave the house: are they trying to go to see a specific person? Can they call them instead?
- **Distraction techniques** and engaging the person in other activities that they enjoy could be very effective. See alzheimers.org.uk/covid-activities for activity ideas.
- **Consider creating a controlled walking route**, such as with posters on lampposts, which may keep their walks shorter and closer to their home (although this is unlikely to work in a situation where a person feels they need to go somewhere specific).
- **Complete a Herbert Protocol form** for all residents who walk around. The Herbert Protocol is a national scheme which encourages carers to record useful information which could be useful in the event of a vulnerable person going missing. This helps reduce the amount of time a vulnerable person is missing. (See www.beta.northumbria.police.uk/advice-and-info/personal-safety/missing-persons/).
- **Make sure the person carries some form of identification** or the name and phone number of someone who can be contacted if they get lost. Consider identification bracelets like those provided by MedicAlert.
- **A person with dementia should never be locked in the home if they are alone**, in case of fire or falls, and **people should not use medication** to prevent the person from walking.
- **A person should only be locked in if it is a last resort**, they are not alone, it's believed that they are unable to make a decision for themselves about the dangers of leaving the house, it is in the person's best interests and it is the least restrictive option available.
- **If anyone has serious concerns** about the risk posed to a person with dementia in going out, they should report these to Social Services. Local Authorities' aim is to keep people out of hospital – they have been given NHS funding to implement care packages for people who would be admitted to hospital without intervention.

As dementia affects a person's ability to accept rational persuasion and logic, it may not be possible to convince them that they have to stay home. Remember that if you can take the time to understand what the person's needs are, you may be able to resolve the problem.

Other resources:

- Alzheimer's Society's 'Walking about' factsheet: alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/501lp-walking-about-190521.pdf
- Alzheimer's Society coronavirus advice: alzheimers.org.uk/coronavirus