

# Dementia Unit Managers

## Holiday Tips for Your Dementia Unit

National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners

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# Holidays Are the Most Challenging Time of the Year

The holidays are the busiest time of the year for your unit with many family and friends visiting their loved ones. This can also be a stressful time of year as well as challenging for your residents with so much activity. Here are some tips for the residents, family and staff to keep your residents stress free and provide a soothing calm dementia unit.

# Prevent Elopement

- Prevent elopement. Place signs on both the inside and outside of the door that states, “For the safety of our residents, please insure this door is closed.”
- Remind family not to leave their loved ones unsupervised or alone in the car if they take them on outings or home for the holidays.

- Work with the Activity Director to plan and schedule events that include the family such as holiday parties, entertainment and children's events.
- Post activity calendars and leave extra calendars and newsletters at the front desk for visitors and families.

# Track Volunteers, Donations and Special Groups

Develop forms to track any volunteer or group that drops by. Capture on this form the contact name, organization name, contact information (email, address, phone numbers) and document what they provided. Send thank you notes out in January.

# Set Up Email for Holiday Cards and Family Events

- Set up email system for families to send holiday cards and messages to their loved one on living on the unit. Contact your web master early to do this. Print out their messages on pretty holiday stationary.
- Mail or e-mail invitations to families about the upcoming events

# Holiday Preparations

- Insure the dementia unit is decorated for the holidays with non paper items.
- Use Non Flamable Decorations
- Order holiday cookies, drinks and deserts and have available for families and visitors.

- Provide holiday drinks such as hot cider with cinnamon sticks. Set up an area for refreshments daily.
- Consider using china and not paper products.
- Bake cookies and holiday breads daily with your residents using bread machine or Otis Spunkmeyer



# Thank Your Volunteers

Purchase gift baskets for volunteers who worked on the dementia unit and distribute to your volunteers.

This includes your clergy who provided services throughout the year.

# Provide Information

- Print out fact sheets about stress, depression and anxiety with regards to the holidays from different care giver web sites
- Provide list of support group web sites.
- Provide list of area support groups.
- Provide to families and staff.

# Recommended Gifts

- Families and Friends do not always know what to purchase for their loved one.
- Provide a list of recommended gift items for their loved ones.

# Family Meetings

For the next family meeting invite a guest speaker to address anxiety, stress and the holidays from local dementia organizations or hospital speaker's bureau

- Print out fact sheets about stress, depression and anxiety with regards to the holidays from different care giver web sites and support sites.
- Provide to families and staff.
- Leave also out in lobby and in employee break rooms

# Ways to Visit and Approved Snack List

Add a section in the facility newsletter about visiting during the holidays.

Include and remind families that short visits are recommended.

# Approved Snack List

- List what is on the approved snacks list (snacks in sealed wrappers and don't spoil) and what is not on the approved snack list, such as egg nog.
- They can bring it in but there are items that can not be left in their rooms.
- Remind family to be aware of foods loved one is allergic or may have a reaction to due to medication.

# Offer An Explanation

Explain why you request that snacks be kept in closed containers. Remind them that it's ok to hold hands and provide hugs. Conversation may be limited but they still desire nurture and love.

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- Include a list of approved plants and recommendations for gifts.
- Provide a recommended list of holiday decorations

- Explain to families that all decorations must be approved by the Dementia Unit Manager. Remind them not to bring in decorations that can easily be swallowed or items that look like food. Example: a cornucopia with fake fruits and vegetables. Or ceramic ginger bread men.
- In some states regulations ban the use of power strips and extension cords and your families may not be aware of the regulations.

- Also include information about stress and tips for handling the holidays.

# Staff Burnout

- Look for signs of stress and burnout with your staff and address immediately. Be aware of what the signs are. Such as weight fluctuation, repeated call outs, increase in tardiness, missing deadlines, problems with relationships, irritable, overly sensitive, increase in colds and illness, lack of enjoyment, cynical or bitter, constant complaining, easily annoyed, wanting to go home early and no longer cares about their patients or daily performance

# What to do?

- Meet with staff member
- Allow time to vent
- Change assignment
- Provide time off
- Provide an in-service and literature that address stress
- Refer to HR for community resources and help

# Address Approaches and Interventions for Agitation and Behaviors

Provide additional in-services that address agitation, behaviors, non pharmacological approaches and interventions.

Order copies of the book ***Creating Moments of Joy from [www.activitytherapy.com](http://www.activitytherapy.com) that provides wonderful suggestions and approaches for repetitive questions.***

# Daily Staff Stand Up Meetings

Have daily stand up meeting with your staff and update the staff daily about unit concerns and new admissions.

Staff includes Housekeeping, CNA's, Social Service, Activities and Nursing.

# Every Day is Ground Hog Day

Stick to the routine as much as possible. Preserve the daily routines that include; activities, meals, outside walks and exercise. Structure and continuity provides comfort to the residents.



# Overload

Be aware of resident's behavior signaling overload or sun downing. Watch for cues or signs such as pacing, pulling at clothes, yelling out, crying or withdrawal

# Use Non Pharmacological Approaches

If this happens take the resident to a quiet place or area. Additional nap time may be needed. Try non pharmacological patient specific approaches such as, rocking chairs, white noise such as fans, large fish tanks, pet therapy, aroma therapy, light therapy, music, singing, dancing, relaxation videos, exercise and walks, Build a Bear with prerecorded message from family, body pillow with

Family members scent, dolls and stuffed animals, reminisce and reminisce tapes, relaxation and guided imagery, sensory rooms, validation therapy and short drive.

But decide as a team if the behavior is harmful or a danger to self or others and may require medical intervention.

- Check for UTI or other medical reasons that may be causing a change in behavior.
- Involve the team and Physician

# Supervision

- When residents leave the unit for entertainment, assign staff to closely supervise to avoid any chance of elopements.
- Schedule trips to drive through neighborhoods to look at holiday lights. Provide plenty of supervision when on trips. Choose small venues. Schedule short drives rather than longer trips.

# They Want To Feel Useful

Involve the residents (daily) in decorating the tree, stringing cranberries and popcorn, distributing the decorations throughout the unit, wrapping presents, putting gifts in boxes or gift bags, icing cookies.

# Sensory Items

Make use of sensory items. May Spark a memory. Play holiday music, bake bread using a bread machine and holiday cookies in ovens or portable ovens. Have the Activity Staff's provide holiday sensory items that make great craft projects such as Clove-studded oranges, evergreens, cinnamon, and peppermint

# Pet Therapy

If possible purchase large aviary and large fish tanks which are fantastic sensory activity.

Small cages and small tanks not recommended.



# Daily Environmental Rounds

Conduct safety and environmental rounds daily. Check resident's rooms and common areas. Families mean well but at times they may bring items onto the unit that pose a safety hazard. Example, artificial fruit may be mistaken for food. Food in proper containers and cans with lids. Families may wish to decorate their loved ones room and it is recommend that blinking lights not be used because it can cause disorientation.

Additionally, check to insure all food that is brought in are closed containers and is not rotten or spoiled.

# Approved List

- Provide a list to families of recommended items that are approved for the holidays. For example, explain the hazards of items or decorations that look like food but can pose a choking hazard.

# Cut Down on Spread of Infections and Colds

- Insure residents receive flu shots.
- Keep anti bacterial soap at nurse's station and encourage all visitors and staff to wash their hands upon entering the unit and leaving the unit.

# Customer Service Is Vital

- Insure staff greet all visitors and family with a warm smile.
- Insure staff acknowledge when they leave and thank them for coming.
- Provide a coat rack for visitors and families to leave their belongings in a secure area.

# Coats and Hats and Gloves

Inventory all resident's rooms and notify family of those residents needing coats, hats and gloves.

# Be Prepared

Be prepared and ready for snow days and staff call outs.

Review emergency preparedness plans. Plan, anticipate and be prepared for emergencies

# Enjoy the Holiday

- Plan a holiday party for your staff
- Thank them for the year of fantastic service to your residents.
- Take lots of pictures of holiday events and post around your community and in your newsletter and city paper



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