



Dementia-Friendly Pharmacists

Pharmacists have a unique opportunity through their work to observe changes in customers who may have diagnosed or undiagnosed dementia. A pharmacist's professional practice allows for customer education and analysis of both prescription and over-the-counter medication usage. Pharmacists can also identify potential medication interactions, and have a professional awareness of how customers are managing their health. While the experience may occur anywhere from rarely to frequently, pharmacists are likely to encounter customers with dementia in the course of their work. In fact, 70 percent of people with dementia live within the community rather than in an adult care facility. As a dementia-friendly pharmacist, you can provide a higher level of customer service and health care to all members of the community.

WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a term used to describe the symptoms of more than 100 conditions that are characterized by a decline in memory or other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities.

SIGNS OF DEMENTIA

Many dementias are progressive, with signs and symptoms starting out slowly and gradually getting worse. While symptoms of dementia can vary greatly, at least two of the following core mental functions must be significantly impaired to be considered dementia:

- Judgment
- Perception
- Reasoning
- Organizational abilities
- Memory
- Abstract thinking
- Communication and language
- Ability to focus and pay attention
- Orientation to time and place
- Awareness of socially appropriate norms
- Ability to filter emotional responses

WHAT IS A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY BUSINESS?

Dementia-friendly businesses recognize the challenges that accompany dementia and help enable people with dementia to have a good quality of life. Their personnel are able to recognize the signs of dementia, communicate with people with dementia, and locate resources and assistance for themselves and for the people they serve.

DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY PHARMACY GUIDELINES

- Train all professional pharmacists and management, and at least 50 percent of front-line staff.
- Designate a team leader to speak on behalf of the pharmacy.
- Be open to discussions regarding environment changes (lighting, signage, etc.).
- Share all training materials with new hires and those unable to attend the in-person trainings.
- Encourage all new employees to take the free, 20-minute online training found at www.uwosh.edu/dementia, listed under "Additional Courses" in the left navigation.



DEMENTIA IN PHARMACIES

Due to dementia's effect on judgment, memory, and ability to follow instructions independently, it may be challenging for people with dementia to take their medications as directed. Many older adults see more than one physician who prescribes medications, which can result in medication interactions and unintended side effects. In addition, people with diabetes have a higher risk of developing dementia.

Pharmacists should be aware of customers who are not properly managing chronic conditions, are erratically noncompliant in taking medications, repeatedly contact the pharmacy for the same issue, or fail to pick up important prescriptions in a timely manner. While these behaviors do not necessarily mean that a customer has dementia, pharmacists should take special care when working with people in these circumstances.

For patients with dementia, simple changes to prescription management could have a significant impact. Positive steps include offering tablets in blister packs, or, if financially feasible, suggesting an electronic tablet dispenser to remind patients to take the correct medication. Other helpful options include advising patients to use a calendar, diary, or other type of marker to tick when medication is taken, or to change the location of their medicines to a more visible location. Consider talking to the patient's doctor about simplifying medication regimens to reduce the number of times patients have to take their tablets per day.

Dementia affects each person differently. What works for one patient may not work for another. Flexibility and understanding go a long way in providing the best possible care to all customers, including those with dementia.

RESOURCES

For more information on dementia and how to become dementia-friendly, visit:

- Is It Dementia: A Resource for Recognizing the Signs of Dementia
<http://isitdementia.com.au>
- Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin
<http://www.pswi.org/>
- A Toolkit for Building Dementia-Friendly Communities
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01000.pdf>
- Adult Protective Services
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aps/index.htm>
- Dementia Care Specialist
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/dementia-care-specialist-program.htm>
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/consumer/index.htm>
- Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin
www.alzwisc.org
- CDC Healthy Brain Initiative
www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain

