

(1. How common is Dementia in Hong Kong ?)

According to a study, the prevalence of dementia among community elders aged 65-70 was around 1 in 100, and the prevalence of dementia among those aged 85-90 was 1 in 3.

From this projection, in year 2036, the total number of patients with dementia will increase up to 230,000.

(2. What are the symptoms of dementia?)

Dementia is a progressive disease of the brain. Other than affecting the memory, there is also decline in cognitive and intellectual function such as, comprehension, learning capacity, the ability to think and calculate, as well as language and judgment. Patients gradually deteriorate with impaired functioning in daily activities, some also with emotional and behavioural problems.

There are three stages for dementia:

- Early stage - memory loss with decreased ability to think
- Intermediate stage - easily get lost, mood changes and behavioral problems, need assistance with daily activities
- Late stage - language impairment, cannot recognize relatives, may become incontinent and totally dependent

Keypoints for good communication with elders suffering from dementia

- Maintain a quiet environment and try to maintain eye contact at all times to ensure we get their attention.
- Encourage the use of hearing aids in patients with hearing problems. Try to stand at the side which the patient has better hearing ability or eye sight
- Speak slowly and clearly. Do not shout at the patient and try not to raise the voice. Keep the sentences as simple as possible. Convey one message at a time.
- Allow sufficient time for patient to respond as their response or thinking may be slow. Repeat yourself or prompt the patient if necessary.
- Ask close-ended questions with limited choices such as 'Would you like an apple or an orange?' instead of asking 'What types of fruit would you like?'. Use real objects, pictures or words to aid communication.
- Avoid excessive body language as it may seem intimidating for the patient. If the patient is tired, pat him on the shoulder or hand over a drink for refreshment. Take a break before starting again
- We need to understand and always remind ourselves that what the patient said or did does not necessarily reflect their actual sense and feelings, nor do they mean to do it deliberately to create trouble for you. In fact, they are just the consequences of the disease