

22 May 2012

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## Media Release

### Remember the person

Staff at the Royal United Hospital are using Dementia Awareness Week, from 21-15 May, to remind people that there is more to a person than their illness.

Using two simple and practical ideas - a leaflet, and a 'life box' – staff are connecting with patients with dementia and providing care that goes beyond the excellent clinical care they champion.

The 'This is me' leaflet is helping staff to learn about a patient's habits, hobbies, likes and dislikes and provides a 'snapshot' of the person behind the dementia. Developed by the Alzheimers Society, 'This is me' can be filled out and given to staff when a person with dementia goes into hospital.

Ward Manager Anita West explains: "People with dementia can become agitated and confused when they are in an unfamiliar environment. This leaflet helps staff to respond to their needs and help reduce their feelings of agitation and distress. It means we don't have to ask the same questions over and over again, possibly leading to further frustration for the patient.

"We ask about people's lives, from their childhood, adulthood and on to retirement, and include families, work, hobbies. Perhaps most importantly, we ask 'what might upset me' such as separation from a loved one, or 'what relaxes me', so that we can individualise the care to the patient.

"It is incredibly useful on the wards and helps us gain a greater understanding of our patients' lives. We might have a patient who keeps getting up in the night and who gets distressed when we try to encourage him back to bed. Information in the 'This is me' leaflet could tell us he was a milkman for 40 years and getting up at 4am was part of his everyday routine."

The 'life box', is filled with items selected by the family which are important to their loved ones. Perhaps a game they like to play like dominoes, or a word search puzzle, family photographs, or a favourite book. These items help relieve boredom and give pleasure in a quiet moment, or help soothe agitation.

Anita says: "It's about understanding the person behind the condition. Understanding a bit more about their history can really help us to connect and bond with a patient."

The RUH is leading on dementia care and has been spearheading many changes. Seven hospital wards have received a Gold or Silver Charter Mark for the care they are giving patients with dementia, and work continues to improve the patient experience.

The Charter Mark Standard was developed with the voluntary organisation Alzheimer's Support. It is the first such scheme in the UK and provides a 'gold standard' for staff to ensure care for people with dementia on all adult wards, not just those specifically for older people, is the very best that it can be.

Part of the Charter Mark assessment includes how the Trust ensures dementia patients remain nourished and are drinking enough, and how they are assisted in finding their way around the ward.

Regular comfort rounds have been introduced involving several visits to each patient to check and record such things as fluid intake, skin condition, if there is pain or confusion. Patients have protected (and assisted) mealtimes to help staff monitor what, and how much, a patient eats.

New pictorial signs are helping patients orientate themselves on the ward, and new crockery is helping those with impaired vision, coordination and dexterity, to remain independent at meal times.

## **Ends**

## **Notes**

There are currently 800,000 people with dementia in the UK, and at any one time, up to a third of all patients in hospital may have dementia or delirium.