



DEMENTIA CARE SERIES

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
THOUGHTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING

Caring Sheet #6: Moving Persons with Dementia?

Tips Regarding Behaviors to Ease the Way.

By Laura Struble, PhD

Introduction

To make the move into a long term care facility easier for the person with dementia, consider the following conditions and circumstances that may develop after the move.

- **Adjusting to New Surroundings:** Research reported in the literature has suggested that people are able to find their way around in a new place in less than three months depending upon their level of dementia. Some of the research findings were:
 - 1) A person with dementia who could find their way around without trouble before the move could more likely do this in a new facility.
 - 2) A person with dementia who could find places sometimes, but became lost at other times usually had trouble finding new locations after the move. In some instances they never found as many places as they did in their previous living situation.
 - 3) A person with dementia who could not find any locations in their current living situation could not find their way around after the move.

- **Wayfinding Recommendations:** Staff and family should walk around the facility with the person with dementia each day for at least the first month. Explore the various locations and point out landmarks (e.g., chair in hallway, clock, water fountain, window) that would help the person with dementia find their way around. If the



person with dementia understands signs, make signs with words and arrows to point out locations. Also, post the person's name in large letters on the bedroom door and use other identifiable pictures or articles the person with dementia would recognize to help them find their room.

- **Developing Friendships:** When a group of dementia residents moves from one facility to another the friendships they had with each other within the group may be lost. This may be due to the person with dementia not realizing friends are in the same facility, because they have different room assignments. Show the person with dementia where their friends now live and encourage frequent visits. When a person with dementia comes alone into a facility, it can be difficult to make friends. Staff and family should introduce the new dementia resident to other residents. Think about the type of resident the person might like to sit and/or visit with to encourage friendships.
- **Emotional Status After the Move:** Expect that the move will be stressful to the person with dementia. People with dementia who walk or propel their own wheelchair around the physical environment may either show more signs of anxiety and nervousness or become more withdrawn and stay in their room. Dementia residents who do not explore their physical environment and who have staff physically guide them to various locations often do not seem to show as many signs of stress. Be aware of these potential signs of stress along with other behaviors such as paranoia/mistrust, anger, and depression. Plan a staff and family meeting to problem solve and develop specific interventions to help the person with dementia through this difficult time.
- **Changes in Weight:** Monitor the weight and eating patterns of the person with dementia until they are stable. Frequently weight loss is a problem. This could be related to stress, different type and presentation of food served and/or different routines in the new facility. The exact opposite may also occur in which the person with dementia gains weight.



This may be related to anxiety, paranoia, along with hoarding food, depression, and/or a decrease in activity level. Be aware of all of these possibilities. Try to identify the causes early and prevent major changes in weight.

- **Changes in Memory and Thinking:** When the person with dementia moves into a new facility you may notice that he/she acts more confused. This is likely because they are unfamiliar with the place and routines. The dementia symptoms may become more noticeable and can be very distressing. As much as possible, try to maintain the same routines the person previously followed, and spend time showing him/her around the new facility. Bring in objects the person remembers and uses (e.g., bedspread, pillows, chair, hairbrush). Staff who cares for the resident should be the same from day to day and should care for the person in a calm, kind and respectful manner. This will help to reduce the stress of this adjustment period.
- **Fall Rates:** A person may not fall any more or less in the new facility than in the previous location. Frequently when falls do occur, they occur in the bedroom. Every precaution should be taken to minimize the risk of falling. Make sure there is adequate lighting during the day and enough light to see the bathroom at night. Pathways should be clear of obstacles and the person with dementia should wear clothing that will not trip them, as well as sturdy walking shoes without shoelaces.

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All Caring Sheets are available online at the following websites:

http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4868_38495_38498---,00.html
(Michigan Department of Health and Human Services MDHHS), at **<http://www.lcc.edu/mhap>** (Mental Health and Aging Project (MHAP) of Michigan at Lansing Community College in Lansing, Michigan), and at **<https://www.improvingmipractices.org/populations/older-adults>** (Improving MI Practices website by MDHHS)

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