Best care for people with Delirium

- It is reassuring for people with delirium to see familiar people. Visit as often as you can and try to be available to help with their care
- Encourage other family members and friends to visit as well
- Speak slowly in a clear voice
- Identify both yourself and the person by name
- Encourage and assist the person to have adequate food and fluids
- Knowing the time of the day can reduce confusion. Remind them where they are and what day it is
- Visual or hearing impairment can make their confusion worse, make sure they have their glasses and hearing aids with them
- If someone with delirium is agitated or aggressive do not try to restrain them. If they want to walk around let them, but try to make sure they are safe
- Bring personal mementos that help remind them of home and familiar people and places
- Let staff know any special personal information that may help calm and orientate the person

Central Gippsland Health
155 Guthridge Parade Sale Victoria 3850
Telephone: 03 5143 8600
Facsimile: 03 5143 8633
E-mail: enquiries@cghs.com.au
Website: www.cghs.com.au

CENTRAL GIPPSLAND HEALTH

Delirium

Getting You Better Together

What is Delirium?

Delirium is a common medical condition that is characterized by changes in mental function. It occurs more often among older people.

When delirium occurs people become confused and may be either very agitated or quiet and drowsy.

This brochure provides information for people who have experienced delirium and for their family/carers about the causes, signs and symptoms and management of delirium.

Who is at risk of developing Delirium?

People who:
- Are very sick
- Have dementia
- Are 70 years of age or more
- Suffer from depression
- Have poor eyesight or hearing loss
- Are taking multiple medications
- Are having a surgical procedure

What causes Delirium?

Common causes of delirium in older people are:
- Infection
- Multiple medical illnesses
- Constipation
- Dehydration/malnutrition
- Severe pain
- Medications (including over the counter medicines)
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Withdrawal from alcohol or medication, particularly sleeping pills

The onset of delirium is sudden with the symptoms usually developing over hours or days. A person's behaviour can also fluctuate during the course of a single day.

Delirium is sometimes mistaken for dementia or depression, so it is important for family/friends to notify medical/nursing staff of any sudden change in a person's mental state.

Delirium usually lasts for a few days but may persist for longer periods. It can be a serious condition but delirium is treatable and most people will fully recover.

Delirium is relatively common affecting about one (1) in five (5) people over the age of 70 admitted to hospital. Close to half of the residents in aged care facilities will experience delirium at some stage of their care.

Symptoms of Delirium

- Appearing confused and forgetful
- Being unable to pay attention
- Being different from their normal selves
- Being either very agitated or quiet and withdrawn or sleepy
- Being unsure of the time of day or where they are
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Feeling fearful, upset or irritable, angry or sad
- Seeing things that are not there, but that seem very real to them
- Losing control of their bladder and/or bowels

Delirium can increase the risk of falls, skin tears and pressure injuries due to the changes in behaviour and mental function.

How is Delirium treated?

- • The treating team will do a thorough medical assessment to look for and treat the underlying cause of the delirium.
- The person may need to undergo tests to identify the cause.
- Other treatments are used to support the person's wellbeing and keep them safe while they are confused.