

End-of-life care for people with dementia

Pain in advanced dementia

Activity

Read the following case study and then try to answer the questions that follow.

Mary is a 78-year-old woman who is in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease. She has osteoarthritis and is doubly incontinent. She is not able to walk and needs help whenever she moves. Mary still manages to eat independently with some assistance from care staff.

Usually Mary is easy going and sociable. She is quite a happy woman who sits and smiles at people around her.

Today when you are trying to help Mary take off her nightdress so that she can have a wash, you notice that she does not look happy, she does not smile at you like she usually does and holds her arms close to her chest. When you try to move her arms she shouts 'No!'.

You decide to leave her in her nightdress and then help her to come out to sit in the dining room for breakfast.

When breakfast is served, Mary would normally just need a little prompting to eat for the first couple of mouthfuls and would then carry on herself. But today you notice that this does not work. She appears to be unable to lift the spoon to her mouth, and seems quiet and withdrawn.

Consider the following questions:

1. List the ways in which Mary's behaviour has changed.
2. Now think of possible reasons for each of the changes in behaviour.
3. How might you assess if Mary is in pain?
4. Complete the Abbey Pain Scale as part of your assessment. For a copy of the tool go to www.dementiacareaustralia.com
5. What might you do to help Mary?