If you have been diagnosed with dementia, you are likely to see a range of health and social care professionals at different times. Although it may seem confusing to meet lots of different people, remember that these professionals provide important support and can help you to live well with dementia.

You will probably see professionals in a range of places, including at the hospital. Some will be NHS health professionals, such as doctors or nurses. They often work alongside ‘allied’ health professionals, such as occupational therapists.

Others who may help you are social care professionals, such as social workers, arranged through your local council. You might also see other staff from a private business, or a voluntary organisation like Alzheimer’s Society or Age UK, such as a dementia adviser.
Seeing a lot of professionals in different places can be confusing. This booklet explains who these professionals are, what they do and how they can help you. It does not cover every possible person you might see.

The following tips may be helpful for you.

- Keep a note of who you have seen and the main things they have said. My visitor book from Alzheimer’s Society is a useful publication to record the health and social care professionals that visit you at home. You can download a copy of the book from alzheimers.org.uk/myvisitorbook

- Ask someone to come along with you to appointments, if you can.

- Keep copies of any letters you get from the hospital, your GP or any other health professional.

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions, or ask anyone to explain anything again if you don’t understand.
‘They have really made the surgery a dementia-friendly environment where we are treated with respect and compassion. When you enter, it is very welcoming and calming.’

Wife of a person with dementia
Doctors

Doctors provide a wide range of services to people with dementia, from initial diagnosis to ongoing care. You may see different types of doctors who have specialist training in different types of medicine.

General practitioners (GPs)
Your GP is the first point of call if you have any concerns about your health. The GP leads the team which will look after your overall health, including any other conditions (e.g., diabetes, depression) you may be living with. They may be the person who gets to know you best.

Your GP can refer you to other health professionals, such as specialists or community nurses, if needed. They may also suggest other services that could be helpful for you. You can see your GP at the surgery, or they may visit you at home. Keep their number somewhere convenient, for example near your telephone, so you always have it to hand.

Your GP can:

- talk to you about your symptoms and medical problems (not just dementia)
- carry out a physical examination
- arrange further tests with a consultant or hospital specialist
- review whether your drugs are working.
Tips for visiting the GP

• Write down things you want to talk about before you go. It can be difficult to remember everything you want to say.

• Make a note of anything important the doctor says. You might want to write down any medical terms, for example.

• Ask the doctor to explain in simpler language if you do not understand what they are telling you.

• If you have any customs or religious beliefs that may affect treatment, mention this to your GP.

• Ring the surgery after the appointment if there is anything you forgot to ask. You may be able to speak to the doctor on the telephone rather than have to make another appointment.

• Ask to see the named GP that has been allocated to you. Seeing the same GP regularly should be better for you. Sometimes this will not be possible, depending on which doctor is available at the surgery.
Consultants

If an appointment with a consultant is arranged for you, this will take place at a hospital. Consultants are doctors who have had years of training and experience in a particular area.

Some will arrange for investigations, such as brain scans, and be able to start prescribing of drugs for dementia. The consultant you see will depend on your age and symptoms, as well as how services are organised in your area. The following are some of the consultants you may be referred to.

Psychiatrists
Psychiatrists diagnose and treat many different mental health problems, including dementia, but also depression, anxiety and others. You might see an old-age psychiatrist, who has specialised in treating older people. If you are under 65, your GP may refer you to a general adult psychiatrist.

Geriatricians
Geriatricians specialise in the care of older people, and in the physical illnesses and disabilities of old age.

Call the National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
Neurologists
Neurologists specialise in the brain and nervous system. Some neurologists have particular experience in dementia, particularly types like dementia with Lewy bodies and Parkinson’s disease dementia.

Clinical psychologists
Clinical psychologists are not medical doctors. They assess memory, learning abilities and other skills. They also offer support to cope with any difficulties you may be experiencing, such as anxiety or mental distress. They often work with consultants in memory clinics as part of a team. Ask your GP for more information.

‘It makes a huge difference when you know all the doctors and staff care so much. You almost feel better just being there.’

Wife of a person with dementia
Nurses

Nurses support people with dementia, as well as those that care for them, in a variety of roles. You might see different types of nurses.

Community mental health nurses (CPNs)
Community mental health nurses are also known as community psychiatric nurses (CPNs). They provide treatment, care and support for people with mental health problems and dementia. They might assess you at home, and they advise you and your carers on ways of improving your health and quality of life. CPNs do not normally carry out physical nursing tasks, such as changing bandages.

You could be referred to a CPN from your GP, a psychiatrist or from an inpatient ward. Your GP surgery can provide more information.

District or community nurses
District or community nurses have had extra training in nursing people at home. They are members of the primary care team based at the GP surgery, which is where you can contact them. District or community nurses can help you with things like taking medication or dressing wounds.
'When my grandad moved 200 miles last year to live near us all, we had to fight for a referral to a community psychiatric nurse. Now he has one and she has been brilliant.'

Granddaughter of a person with dementia
Practice nurses
Practice nurses work with GPs and community nurses. They carry out a range of nursing activities within the GP practice, such as flu jabs and check-ups. Most GP surgeries have one. The practice nurse carries out general treatments (including dressings and injections). They also run clinics (e.g., managing asthma and preventing heart disease) and look after patients with ongoing illnesses (e.g., diabetes).

Admiral nurses
Admiral nurses are nurses who specialise in dementia care, and can support you as well as your carer. Admiral nurses are available in some parts of the UK but not everywhere. You can find details of your local service on their website (see ‘Other useful organisations’ at the end of this booklet).

‘Have you considered talking to an Admiral Nurse if you’ve got them in your area? They are really good, giving moral support and practical help.’

Wife of a person with dementia
Other health professionals

You may see other health professionals in your home, a care home or in hospital. They are sometimes called ‘allied health professionals’. They mainly provide help with specific areas of physical health such as those listed below.

Mobility

You may need some support to stay physically mobile or active, particularly if you have had an operation or fall. You may also need special equipment or changes to your home. The following professionals can help.

Occupational therapists

Occupational therapists (often called OTs) can advise you on how to maintain skills and live independently for as long as possible. They can also advise about assistive technology ‘gadgets’ as well as about equipment and adaptations for your home. Some occupational therapists work for the NHS (ask your GP or consultant) and some for social services (ask the council). If you would prefer to see one privately, contact the College of Occupational Therapists Specialist Section – Independent Practice (see ‘Other useful organisations’).
Physiotherapists
Physiotherapists can advise you on exercise and moving around. They can also advise carers on ways of helping someone to move around safely. You can see a physiotherapist at your local hospital, or sometimes at the GP surgery. Home visits can also be arranged. Your GP can arrange an appointment for you.

If you would prefer to see a private physiotherapist, make sure they are appropriately qualified. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy can provide contact details of a private physiotherapist in your area (see ‘Other useful organisations’).

Chiropodists
Having healthy, pain-free feet will help you to keep mobile. A chiropodist is trained to look after people’s feet and advise you on proper foot care. Ask at the GP practice to see an NHS chiropodist (also known as a podiatrist), but be aware that there may be restrictions on who can be referred. To find a private chiropodist or podiatrist, contact the College of Podiatry (see ‘Other useful organisations’).
'If your GP practice is not dementia friendly then start asking about how and when this is likely to happen, because it does make a difference and the patient voice can be very powerful.'

GP
Vision, hearing and speech

The following professionals look after your eyes and ears, as well as helping you communicate.

**Optometrists**
Problems with sight can make you more confused. This is why it’s important to have your eyesight checked regularly by an optometrist. If you do not have one, ask your GP to recommend someone. Ideally, it is better to find an optometrist who has experience of seeing people with dementia. People aged over 60, and some under-60s who have dementia, are entitled to a free NHS eye examination. Ask your local GP surgery for advice.

**Audiologists**
As with vision, problems with hearing can increase confusion and can leave you feeling isolated. An audiologist can check for hearing problems and fit a hearing aid, if required. If you already have a hearing aid, use it and make sure it is regularly checked. Hearing tests, equipment and equipment checks are free on the NHS. Ask your GP for a referral to the nearest NHS hearing centre.

**Speech and language therapists**
Speech and language therapists can advise you and your carer on ways of communicating more effectively, and on coping with any swallowing difficulties. Your GP may be able to refer you, or you can contact the local speech and language department directly (see ‘Other useful organisations’).
Music therapists
Music therapists use music to help with symptoms of anxiety or restlessness, or help you to express yourself or reminisce. They will engage you in a shared musical experience, through singing, listening or making music. See ‘Other useful organisations’ to find a registered music therapist in your area.

Oral health, nutrition and continence
The following professionals will help you look after your teeth and mouth, diet, bowels and bladder.

Dentists
You should get dental advice soon after a diagnosis, because treatment may become more difficult as symptoms progress. Have regular check-ups to keep your teeth and gums healthy, or to make sure dentures are comfortable – if you wear them.

Dietitians
A dietitian can give you advice about what to eat. They can tell you about poor appetite, weight loss, weight gain, vitamins and food supplements. A professionally qualified dietitian will have the letters ‘SRD’ (State Registered Dietitian) after their name. Ask your GP or consultant about a referral. Some dietitians may be able to come to your home, while others may be based at a local health centre or hospital.
Continence advisers
If you are having problems using the toilet, a continence adviser can offer helpful advice. They can also give you information on useful equipment such as commodes and incontinence pads, which can help you to live independently and stay clean. The GP may be able to refer you to one in your area. You can also get in touch with an adviser directly by calling your local hospital or the organisation PromoCon, part of Disabled Living (see ‘Other useful organisations’).

‘One particular care worker was very good. She really engaged in conversation with him. She was only there for half an hour at a time but felt it was her duty to make sure he was OK.’

Daughter of a person with dementia
Social care professionals

These professionals can help you with non-medical support. This could include support at home with dressing or bathing, equipment and adaptations at home, social activities, day care or replacement (‘respite’) care.

Many of these services are arranged through your local authority (council) social services department. Which services are available will depend on your local authority. The local authority may work with other organisations to provide these services (in partnership). Social services will usually have to assess your needs and ask about your income and savings to decide what services you can receive and whether you have to pay for them.

Getting an assessment and advice is always free. You can ask for an assessment yourself, or a family member, your GP or another health and social care professional can ask for one on your behalf.

Many people will have to pay towards these services. You could ask social services for a list of companies and then arrange for the service privately.
Social workers
Social workers have been specially trained to assess a person’s needs and advise on what services best suit them. They can also help you if you just need to talk things through. Social workers, also referred to as ‘care managers’, work in social services departments, hospitals and care homes. To talk to a social worker, contact your social services department or ask your GP. Social workers can also help sort out funding support and are the primary contact for requesting continuing care funding.

Social care workers
Social care workers can help with personal care such as washing, dressing, changing bedding, doing laundry and helping with meals. They work in your own home as well as in residential care homes. You may need a social care worker at home because you have just come out of hospital and are recovering. Or it may be that your dementia has reached a stage where you need a bit of extra help.

Social care workers are known by a number of names. You might hear them called ‘homecare workers’ or ‘domiciliary care workers’ (home helps) and ‘personal assistants’. (In care homes they tend to be called ‘care workers’.) A support plan should outline what jobs or tasks are needed and who will carry them out.

Homecare workers and personal assistants are usually employed by private companies called, care agencies, you can pay for them with a personal budget (if you are entitled to one), or privately with your own money, or a mixture. To find a list of registered homecare agencies, ask your local social services or the UK Homecare Association.

Call the National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
Other useful organisations

British Association for Music Therapy
2nd Floor Claremont building
24-27 White Lion Street
London N1 9PD
T 020 7837 6100
E info@bamt.org
W www.bamt.org

The professional body for music therapy in the UK. They can provide information and put you in touch with a therapist.

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
14 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4ED
T 020 7306 6666
W www.csp.org.uk

The professional body for physiotherapists in the UK. They can provide information and put you in touch with a physiotherapist in your area.

College of Occupational Therapists
106-114 Borough High St
London SE1 1LB
T 020 7357 6480
W www.cot.co.uk

The professional body for occupational therapists in the UK. They can provide information and put you in touch with a therapist in your area.

For more information visit alzheimers.org.uk
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
2 White Hart Yard
London SE1 1NX
T 020 7378 1200
E info@rcslt.org
W www.rcslt.org

The professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. They can put you in touch with a therapist in your area.

College of Podiatry
2nd Floor, Quartz House
207 Providence Square
Mill Street
London SE1 2EW
T 020 7234 8620
W www.scpod.org

The professional body for podiatry in the UK. They can provide information and put you in touch with a podiatrist in your area.

Promo Con
Disabled Living
Burrow House, 10 Priestly Road
Wardley Industrial Estate
Worsley
Manchester M28 2LY
E promocon@disabledliving.co.uk
W www.disabledliving.co.uk/promocon

An organisation that provides advice and support for all types of bladder and bowel related issues.

Call the National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122
This publication has been reviewed by people affected by dementia and health and social care professionals. A full list of sources is available on request.

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Alzheimer’s Society is the UK’s leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website, and more than 3,000 local services. We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer’s disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call the Alzheimer’s Society National Dementia Helpline on 0300 222 1122. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)