A practical tried and tested method for equipping staff that work in dementia care services to deliver person-centred care

Created and delivered by the
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“Treat other people as you would like to be treated yourself.”

The Golden Rule

Caring for people with dementia is a hugely complex and demanding activity that needs a special mix of compassion, kindness and motivation to improve the lives of other people. Caregivers of people with dementia require a whole host of knowledge and skills that matches the complex range of social, cognitive, behavioural and emotional needs of the people they care for.

The Dementia Gold programme has been developed to equip anyone working in an environment that provides care and services for people with dementia to interact with and treat them, as they would wish to be treated themselves. It takes a ‘whole home approach’ whereby everyone who works in the home or dementia care service is part of the team and their role is supporting people to live well with dementia.

At the heart of Dementia Gold is one simple principle:

That you should treat other people as you would like to be treated yourself
(The Golden Rule)

To do this requires excellent communication skills and understanding of the needs of people with dementia. This can be very difficult when the illness interferes with the ability to communicate, particularly if it affects speech. But people with dementia never lose the urge to communicate and be part of the social world.

Therefore, the people who care for them must use their full range of communication skills, including nonverbal ones, to nurture people with dementia and keep treating them as fellow human beings.
The Dementia Gold programme

The skills-based programme is suitable for anyone within a dementia care environment, including those who provide support and ancillary services to deliver a ‘whole home approach’.

Dementia Gold participants work in pairs to support each other to try out each new skill and reflect on what they have learnt. This model of partnership working is at the core of giving caregivers the confidence and courage to try new things and support them to take things forwards when the course is over.

An important part of the learning process is for participants to examine the barriers and obstacles to making changes in the services they work in and generate practical strategies for overcoming these. Each participant has their own Gold Account Portfolio, which builds up into a comprehensive pack of skills and information to support them to change practice and pass on their skills to others.

This includes strategies for implementing the personal action plan and a support network that includes their training partner and Gold colleagues as well as the Dementia Gold trainers.

If all the participants are from one home then the analysis of barriers to change and action planning will focus on developing a comprehensive programme to turn that home into a Gold home. If participants are from different homes, each person will develop an individualised plan to achieve realistic change and create a model for spreading their Gold skills to colleagues.

The skills-based approach is designed to equip participants to go into the services in which they work to provide person-centred care to people with dementia by building up their skills over eight practical sessions. This is achieved through hands-on practice of each new skill as it is learnt and immediate reflection on the experience.

This learning is consolidated by a personal action plan that participants take away to put into practice after the first six sessions. Two consolidation sessions are held twelve weeks later and in between the Dementia Gold trainers will support the participants to implement their action plans to make and sustain changes in their practice and their workplace.

The programme also includes a comprehensive analysis of the communication environment, which is used as the basis of changing practice and establishing new ways of interacting within the dementia care home or service.
Day One – Communication

Session 1
9.30  Welcome and introductions
10.00 Pairing up and group formation
10.15 Skills practice – communication in the dementia care environment

11.15 Coffee

11.30 Group activity - exploring the difficulties of communicating with people with dementia
12.00 Skills practice – analysis of the communication environment

12.30 Lunch

Session 2
1.30  Feedback and discussion of skills practice
2.00 Group activity – communicating in different ways

3.00 Tea

3.15 Skills practice - trying a new way of communicating
4.00 Feedback and discussion of skills practice
   Identify priorities for Day 2
4.30 Finish
Day Two – Care Environment

Session 3

9.30  Consolidation of Day 1 learning points

10.00  Group activity – talking about ‘tasks’ and ‘activities’ in dementia care – what is important?

10.45  Coffee

11.00  Group activity – redesigning a dementia care ‘task’ or ‘activity’

11.45  Skills practice - trying out the redesigned activity

12.30  Lunch

Session 4

1.30  Feedback and discussion of skills practice

2.00  Group activity – redesigning dementia care

2.45  Skills practice – one strategy for redesigning dementia care

3.30  Tea

3.45  Feedback and discussion of skills practice

 Identify priorities for Day 3

4.30  Finish
Day Three – Making changes

Session 5

9.30 Consolidation of Day 2 learning points

10.00 Group activity – identifying barriers and obstacles to change

10.45 Coffee

11.00 Skills practice – making a positive change in the dementia care environment

12.00 Feedback and discussion of skills practice

12.30 Lunch

Session 6

1.30 Group activity – developing a plan for making positive changes

2.15 Skills practice – implementing one positive change

3.00 Tea

3.15 Group activity – putting support structures in place - peer mentoring, group mentoring and management support

4.00 Consolidate learning points and action plans

4.30 Finish
Day Four – Consolidation

Session 7

9.30 Sharing experiences over last 3 months – successes, setbacks and learning points

10.45 Coffee

11.00 Group activity - maintaining and developing practice – sharing tips and experiences

11.45 Skills practice – what works best in changing practice?

12.30 Lunch

Session 8

1.30 Group activity – revise action plans to focus on passing on skills to colleagues

2.15 Skills practice - one new strategy for passing on skills to colleagues

3.00 Tea

3.15 Group activity - the role of support structures in taking things forward in your own dementia care environment

4.00 Finalising revised action plan for changing practice and support

4.30 Gold Awards ceremony
Please contact Dr Maggie Ellis at the University of St Andrews to book:

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*This programme was co-developed with Professor Arlene Astell (University of Sheffield/University of Toronto) during her employment as a member of the academic staff at the University of St Andrews.*