
WEEK SEVEN HANDOUT: LIVING AS WELL AS YOU CAN



In the last session, we discussed how dementia is sometimes described as a “journey”. This implies that you still have some way to go on the journey – and that it is important to think about how you can live as well as you can. For example, James McKillop, who became an advocate for the rights of people living with dementia after he was diagnosed, wrote:

Being told I had dementia was like a door re-opening after a difficult time in my life – new challenges, new opportunities. . . . I want people to understand that dementia isn't an end, it's a new beginning where you do things differently. While some things change forever there is a lot you still can do.

Often, people find it hard to think about the future because they know that their problems will become worse. In today's session, we will briefly describe ways in which you can think about the future and prepare for it by making decisions now.

Taking charge of your life

Not everybody wants to think about these things, but some people find it helpful to feel that they have made decisions about their future. Often, this is something that a person can do, and then forget about – safe in the knowledge that if things become worse, then they have made

preparations. Amongst the ways in which you could take charge of your life are:

- ✓ Talking to people around you about the future
- ✓ Making a lasting power of attorney
- ✓ Making a will
- ✓ Making a “living will” (advance decisions and advance statements)

Lasting power of attorney and advance statements

A lasting powers of attorney (LPA) is one of a number of ways to plan ahead. Other ways to plan ahead are advance statements or advance decisions. These allow you to put in writing that you want to refuse certain treatments, or your preferences about other care choices.

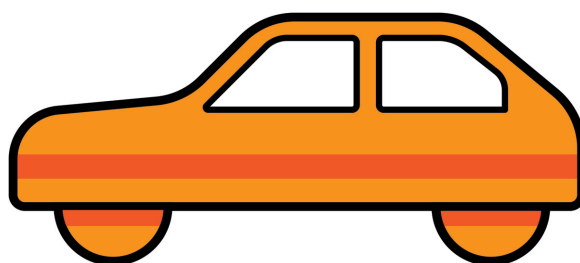
An LPA lets you choose a person you trust to act for you if you come to a point where you can't make decisions yourself. This person is referred to as your “attorney”, and you can choose what decisions they are allowed to make for you.

One type of LPA covers decisions about your property and finances, while the other covers decisions about your health and welfare. You can choose to designate both types or just one. You can appoint the same person to be make decisions for both, or you can have different attorneys.

If you want to create an LPA, then there are forms you need to complete before they are registered – these are available on the internet, or the Alzheimer's Society can provide you with information about this.

Other things you might think about are putting your finances in order and making a will, or updating a will you have already made.

Driving



Having a diagnosis of dementia is not in itself necessarily a reason to stop driving. What matters, from both a legal and a practical point of view, is whether you are still able to drive safely.

However, if you have been given a diagnosis of dementia and you want to continue to drive, then you must, by law, inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

The DVLA will send you a questionnaire for your permission for them to contact your GP and/or specialists. On the basis of the information they get back, they will make a decision as to whether you can continue to drive. They may also ask you to take a driving test.

You must also immediately inform your car insurance company. If you don't, then your policy may become invalid.

Although giving up driving is often hard, there are many ways around the problems that not driving can create – for instance, the money that you save will often more than cover the cost of getting a taxi more regularly.

What alternatives do you have to driving a car?

What can you do to change your situation?

Is there anything that you can do to help you to feel better?

- ✓ Taking things up that you haven't done for a while (which may perhaps need to be done in a different way)
- ✓ Picking up a hobby or attending a club
- ✓ Sharing ideas of hobbies/clubs people attend
- ✓ Thinking about doing mental exercises such as crosswords and quizzes on TV.
- ✓ Having a healthy lifestyle – getting exercise and having a good diet
- ✓ Asking yourself, how have you coped with difficult times in the past? Are there things that helped you then that you think could help you now?

What else can you do to change your situation?