

Who's Who in Dementia Care

Caring for someone with dementia



Alzheimer National Helpline

1800 341 341

If you are concerned about yourself or somebody close to you and start to have these concerns investigated, you may meet a number of different healthcare professionals.

Each person will be responsible for different aspects of the condition and care. This is often referred to as the multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach to dementia.

This guide explains the role of each team member so that you can make the most of an MDT approach.

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, you are likely to see different health and social care professionals at different times. It may seem overwhelming or stressful to meet lots of different people. Remember that these professionals provide important support and can help you to live well with dementia.

Multi-disciplinary team (MDT):

A multi-disciplinary team is a group of healthcare workers who are qualified in different professions, such as psychiatrists, social workers, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, dieticians and nurses. Each of these people provides you with a specific service. Your care plan links up these different services. In line with this plan, the team works together for specific goals.

Primary care team (PCT):

A primary care team is a team of health professionals working in your community outside of the hospital setting. The team includes GPs, public health nurses, occupational therapists, home-care workers and a range of other services provided through your Local Health Office. Members of primary care teams also link with other community-based services to ensure all health and social needs are covered. These services include mental health, counselling and psychology, ophthalmic services, social work and dentistry.

Here is an alphabetical list of people in a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) and primary care team (PCT).

Advanced nurse practitioner (ANP):

Advanced nurse practitioners use their nursing knowledge and critical thinking skills (for example, weighing up a range of different factors) to decide on the best type of care for you. They may assess you in a hospital, nursing home, day-care facility or your own home. They may check up on you at every follow-up appointment and, if they have concerns, may ask a consultant geriatrician to see you.

Clinical nurse specialist (CNS):

A clinical nurse specialist supports you after you receive a diagnosis of dementia, and also supports the family members and carers who can help you to live well with dementia. Working with the MDT, they look after both in-patients and out-patients. If you are in hospital, they assess you and make arrangements for your discharge.



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Clinical psychologist:

A clinical psychologist assesses memory, learning ability and other mental functions. They may set you a range of tests during your appointment. These give a good indication of your mental abilities and difficulties. Often a clinical psychologist will also offer support and counselling.

Community mental health nurse:

Community mental health nurses work outside of hospitals. They visit patients in their own homes, outpatient departments or GP surgeries. After assessing your condition, the community mental health nurse will plan your nursing care, carry it out and check how it is going. They aim to help you regain your mental, social and emotional wellbeing as far as possible. As members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT), they provide all-round care designed to meet your own specific needs.

Dementia adviser:

Dementia advisers provide an essential part of care for you, and your family or carers, before and after diagnosis. They have specialised knowledge of dementia and all the support that is available in your area to people living with dementia. They can help you find your way through the health and social care system to ensure you receive the right support at the right time. They also offer practical assistance, advice, emotional support and information.

Dementia advisers aim to enable you to take control of your own life and to live well with dementia. They give a personalised service, designed to meet your individual needs. There is a dementia adviser in each county in Ireland.

You do not need a referral to contact your local dementia adviser. The details of all dementia advisers are available on www.alzheimer.ie or you can ring the National Helpline **1800 341 341** for information on how to contact them.

Dietician:

A dietician is an expert on food and nutrition. They advise you on how to improve your health by eating properly. Dieticians can help you control your weight, build up your muscles or make up for any loss of nutrients in your diet. They will show your family members and carers how to help you enjoy mealtimes. They may recommend nutritional supplements such as shakes or yoghurts if they feel your diet does not meet your daily nutritional needs. Your GP or public health nurse can refer you to a dietician.

General practitioner (GP):

If you are concerned that you or someone you care for may be showing early signs of Alzheimer's disease, the first step is to make an appointment with the GP. The GP takes an overview of your case, including physical, psychological and social considerations.

Although the GP can make a diagnosis, they will usually refer you to a specialist for further assessment. In their referral letter to a specialist, they will outline your history and your medical and social background, as well as the findings of any physical examination. The letter may include important non-medical information such as your occupation, number of dependants, and whether you have a carer. It will also outline what sort of support you may need.

If the specialist makes a diagnosis, they will tell your GP. From then on, the GP will manage your care. If a problem arises, the GP will decide whether they can deal with it. If not, they will refer you back to the specialist or to another service, such as a memory clinic or occupational therapy.

Geriatrician:

A geriatrician is a medical doctor specialising in the diagnosis, treatment and management of illnesses of older age. Geriatricians specialise in understanding how memory fails and mental functions deteriorate, and they investigate the reasons for these changes. They work as part of both acute care and community-based teams, usually alongside nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, dieticians, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists.

Contact the Alzheimer National Helpline for free confidential help and support.

The Helpline is open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm and Saturday 10am to 4pm.
Freephone **1800 341 341**. Email: helpline@alzheimer.ie Visit or live chat via www.alzheimer.ie

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Neurologist:

A neurologist is a medical doctor who specialises in the diagnosis, treatment and management of disorders of the brain and nervous system, especially disorders which affect movement and consciousness.

Neurologists look after conditions relating to the central nervous system, such as dementia, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy and migraine. They normally work in large hospitals where the scanning equipment needed for testing is readily available. Most of the people referred to a neurologist are aged under 65.

Occupational therapist (OT):

An occupational therapist helps you maintain your physical abilities and remain independent in your daily activities. This can include finding ways to get round problems relating to the symptoms of dementia. For example, an OT can teach you ways to improve your memory. They can help you with activities you might find difficult, such as getting in or out of bed, getting dressed or going upstairs and downstairs.

An OT can also advise on practical measures to keep you as independent as possible, such as changing the layout of the furniture, making adaptations or alterations to your home, or buying specialised equipment. This may include mobility aids or communication systems and can cover anything from wheelchairs to call buttons. It is often called assistive technology. Your GP or public health nurse can refer you to an OT.

You will also find an occupational therapist in most memory technology resource rooms. (Memory technology resource rooms have been set up by the HSE all over the country. They are for people who would like to know more about products and devices that can help manage memory difficulties.) Details of where and how to find your local resource room are listed on the Alzheimer Society of Ireland website: www.alzheimer.ie/get-support/equipment-adaptions-and-technology/assistive-technology-memory-libraries-in-ireland/

Physiotherapist:

Physiotherapists play a vital role in getting you up and about and keeping you mobile. They will work with you and your carers to encourage a healthy lifestyle, enabling you to keep active and independent for as

long as possible. This includes helping you avoid falls and fractures. Although people with dementia often have difficulty in showing or talking about pain, a physiotherapist can identify and treat pain and show your family, carers or home-care staff how to help you cope with it. Your GP or public health nurse can refer you to a physiotherapist.

Psychiatrist:

A psychiatrist is a doctor who specialises in diagnosing and treating mental health issues, especially those relating to thinking and mood. Their assessment can be particularly helpful where diagnosis is difficult, for example in cases where severe depression may be causing symptoms like those of dementia.

Psychiatrist of old age (or of later life):

A psychiatrist of old age is a doctor who specialises in providing mental health services to people aged over 65. A psychiatrist of old age will have a great deal of experience in diagnosing dementia and advising on how to manage the symptoms associated with the disease. For example, they can help you cope if dementia makes you become aggressive or agitated, or causes symptoms such as depression, delusions and hallucinations.

Public health nurse (PHN):

The public health nurse is a qualified general nurse, who is based in the community and works out of the local health centre. The public health nurse calls on you in your own home and can visit regularly if required.

A public health nurse assesses your needs and coordinates support services if you need them. For example, they can refer you to day-care and home-care facilities where available, and can arrange for you to have home help, care attendants, meals on wheels and respite care. They liaise with your GP and carry out basic nursing duties such as changing dressings, and can also advise you on dealing with incontinence.

Social worker:

Social workers work with multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) based in hospital, or with some primary care teams (PCTs) and mental health teams in the community. Social workers help you and your family with mental, emotional and social needs (this is called psychosocial support).



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They can link you up with a range of services run by voluntary organisations as well as the statutory services run by government agencies.

Social workers can provide advice and information on social welfare, financial and legal issues, including the Fair Deal Scheme, and can speak to the authorities on your behalf to make sure your needs are recognised and met. You or a family member can ask your hospital consultant, GP or public health nurse to refer you to a social worker.

Speech and language therapist:

Speech and language therapists can help if you have difficulty in using language, remembering facts, or acting on information. They cover a range of communication problems, including difficulty in paying attention and listening or speaking. Speech and language therapists also help to make sure you are eating safely. They can check how well you can swallow food and drink, and will advise you and your family about changing your diet if needed. Your GP or public health nurse can refer you to a speech and language therapist.

Helpful tips when seeing health and social care professionals

- Before an appointment, write down in a notebook any questions you would like answered. Bring this notebook to all future appointments, so that you will have a record of information.
- On the day of your appointment, take your notebook and a pen with you. Write down any information that you may find useful. The nurse or doctor may write things down for you.
- If you don't understand something, or need more time to write it down, ask to have it repeated.
- If crowded places make you feel uncomfortable, ask for an appointment at a quieter time. Then your appointment will be less likely to get delayed.
- You can ask someone to come along with you to appointments if you feel this would help you.
- Keep a copy of all the letters you receive about your appointments in a safe place.

Factsheet: A2 **First Published:** January 2022

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