

## Dementia Deliberations

# Clash of the Walking frame

*"The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them."* - Ralph Nichols



English people are renowned for not showing emotion and often feel embarrassed witnessing it. When we feel uncomfortable about a situation we tend to avoid or ignore it. Instead, perhaps we should take the focus off ourselves and listen to what the other person actually expressing.

In a dementia care home recently, as I was gathering residents together for afternoon tea group (**run on a validation-type approach**). A resident knocked her walking frame into the legs of another resident. Well, a fight nearly broke out. I separated the two ladies and kneeling down between them, simply said *'We live so closely together here, it's hard to have our own space, do you miss not having your own space?'* Wow. The discussion that followed covered *'missing home,' 'living with strange people,' 'not having our own things around us,' 'people rushing around.'* After a powerful and revealing discussion that was rewarding for all three of us, the ladies have found a companion remained sitting together sipping their tea happily.

It made me realise that the act of one lady knocking into the other wasn't the actual issue. There were deeper feelings that were not being expressed about *life in the care home* and these are the **conversations that matter**. Conversations like these help us build relationships and make us feel understood. It allows us to tell our story. Sometimes it is easy to rush in and fix situations because we think, as professional carers, this is what is expected of us. We must remember people with dementia, just like us, have views and feelings that they need to express and sort out for themselves. Caring does not mean *fixing*, but perhaps *listening, acknowledging, sharing or just being alongside* the person in the good, the bad and the ugly.

Validating is an active listening skill and is saying to an individual *'I hear you and trying to understand what you are feeling'*. As a human being and trainer, I believe **person-centred**

**validation is an essential skill in dementia care.** I only wish more people would practice this, and it does take practice! Therefore, today when someone around you (with or without dementia) is expressing strong feelings, stop, focus your attention on what they are experiencing, and just consider the alternative conversation.

Enough deliberations for now...

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