

Delirium & Dementia

Nursing

An acute, fluctuating, often reversible state against a slow progressive one.

Delirium

- Onset over hours to days
- Course fluctuates, often worse at night
- Attention is markedly impaired
- Consciousness level altered
- Usually has a findable, treatable cause
- Can be hypoactive and so missed entirely

Dementia

- Onset over months to years
- Course is gradual and progressive
- Attention preserved until late
- Consciousness level normal
- Memory and function decline over time
- Delirium can occur on top of it

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Any acute change in a person with dementia is treated as delirium until it has been investigated.

Educational reference. Screen with a validated tool, look for causes, and escalate. Local delirium pathways and medical review govern