Dementia – an approach

Given that a significant number of Volunteers in Cathedral are people who have reached retiring age there will inevitably be a time when the onset of dementia will start to impact some of them. Quite often dementia is the elephant in the room and it is sensible to begin to address the problems that will come with this at an early stage and to have procedures and protocols in place to help.

Staff at the Cathedral are not qualified to make any professional diagnosis but changes in someone’s character, personality or abilities can be noticed so it may be appropriate to consider taking some action. Safeguarding also mandates you to address the situation as the person concerned will become more and more vulnerable.

Clearly the Cathedral will want to support the volunteer for as long as practicable but there may come a time when they could pose a danger to themselves or others and action will be needed.

Consequently, it makes sense to broach the topic with all volunteers and open the debate. The Volunteer Manager is not a professional in this area and so cannot take sole responsibility for any diagnosis or for the welfare of the volunteer

Here are some steps you can take:

1. Ensure you have up-to-date contacts for family and or friends to contact
2. Confidential lines of communication from Volunteers to the Volunteer Manager if someone has a concern about another volunteer
3. Suggestion to all volunteers to set up Lasting Powers of Attorney – you could get help from the Cathedral’s solicitors but there is a free online form <https://www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney> There are fees to register the forms though.
4. Have lines of communication set up with Social Services.
5. Contacting the Volunteers doctors if written permission has been given.
6. Have regular meetings with the volunteer concerned to discuss what actions to take and when
7. Ensure the Clergy has contact with the Volunteer.
8. Run Dementia awareness sessions for all staff and volunteers.

**Lasting Powers of Attorney**For a person with a diagnosis of dementia, there may come a time when they are unable to make decisions about their care and their finances. This happens when someone is found to no longer have the capacity to make these decisions.

A lasting power of attorney (LPA) is a legal document appointing one, or more, trusted people to be a person’s attorney(s).  An attorney is a person responsible for making decisions on their behalf.

If there is no LPA drawn up the costs involved in getting one after a person no longer has mental capacity is considerable may take some time too so it is highly advisable to have one in place.

There are two types of LPA.  It is possible to draw up one, or both. The same attorney(s) can be appointed for both, or someone different can be appointed for each.

They are:
**Health and welfare**, which appoints an attorney to make decisions regarding medical care, future care needs such as moving into a care home, and life-sustaining treatment. It can only be used once the person can no longer make their own decisions.
**Property and financial affairs**, which appoints an attorney to make decisions regarding managing a bank or building society account, paying bills, collecting benefits or a pension, or buying and selling a house. This can be used immediately if the person making  it gives their permission.

An LPA is only valid in England and Wales. People in Northern Ireland can contact the Office of Care and Protection for advice on 0300 200 7812 (or visit [www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/office-care-and-protection](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/office-care-and-protection) .
People in Scotland can contact the Office of the Public Guardian (Scotland) on 01324 678398
[www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk)](http://www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk)).

Some people, including people with dementia, will come to a point where they are unable to make decisions about their finances or care anymore.  This is called loss of ‘mental capacity’. A person is judged to have lost mental capacity when they can no longer understand the information needed to make the decision, weigh the information up, retain the information for as long as is necessary to make the decision, and communicate their decision to others. Appointing an attorney in an LPA before the person with dementia loses mental capacity means that important decisions that best reflect their stated wishes can still be made about their care and affairs once capacity is lost.

A health and welfare LPA will only come into effect once the person has lost the mental capacity to make that particular decision. Whether someone has the mental capacity to make a decision is usually decided by a health or social care professional, who is knowledgeable about the Mental Capacity Act and its Code of Practice.

The assessment of whether a person has mental capacity to make a decision only covers that particular decision, at that particular time – for example, receiving medical treatment. This is because mental capacity can be temporarily lost, for example, while unconscious, sedated by medication, delirious through fever or infection etc. (Please see Sources of support for more information on Capacity).

A property and financial affairs LPA will come into effect as soon as it is registered, unless alternative instructions are stated in the LPA.

People in a civil partnership or marriage might assume their partner can deal with their finances and make decisions about their healthcare should they lose the ability to do so, but this is not necessarily the case.

**If someone has not drawn up an LPA when they are assessed to have lost capacity, and their partner or friend wants to make decisions on their behalf, they may have to apply to the Court of Protection to be appointed as the person’s Deputy. This can be a very long, complex and expensive process**, **and it is advisable to speak to the Office of the Public Guardian on 0300 456 0300 beforehand. Setting up an LPA in advance is strongly recommended.**