

Caring communication: Toolkit to help people with dementia goes online

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DemTalk, an award-winning toolkit designed by Newcastle University experts to help those coping with the condition, has gone online.

The free resource, aimed at family members, carers and [healthcare professionals](#), has been designed to give simple advice and techniques to aid communication at times when even holding a conversation may be difficult. It also supports the role of non-verbal communication such as holding eye contact and encourages people to share their experiences.

The website was initially designed with help from The Alzheimer's Society and was created by Dr Tony Young and Dr John Vines, both from Newcastle University; [psychiatrist](#) Dr David Howells and Christopher Manthorp, a [dementia care](#) expert and writer.

They spoke to people living with [dementia](#), their families and carers to find out about their experiences and what works for them. What they told them formed the basis of the advice on the website.

Dr Young, a senior lecturer in language and communication who specialises in helping those with dementia, said: "Communicating with people with dementia is important for their wellbeing and beneficial for everyone, both carers and those who are being cared for.

"However, communicating with someone living with dementia can be difficult. We put together the DemTalk toolkit to show the different ways you can improve communication. It has proved popular with

professional carers but we wanted it to reach as many people as possible so we set up the website, which is absolutely free to use.

"Dementia affects more than 800,000 people and the Alzheimer's Society estimates that 25 million people in the UK have a close friend or family member with the condition so there are a lot of people who could benefit."

Staff at David's House, a care home in Harrow, London, look after people with dementia and they were involved in the research and development of DemTalk. David's House won a Great British Care Award for care innovator for the London region for using the toolkit earlier this year.

Manager Sherin Hart said: "Communicating with our patients is absolutely paramount. You have to be able to understand what they need or you could be missing out on a vital part of their care. DemTalk helped us do this more effectively.

"Some people with dementia communicate only with immense difficulties or can't communicate verbally at all. Can you imagine how isolating and frustrating that must be for that person? We've found that DemTalk is really helpful because it also shows how important [eye contact](#) and touching are.

"The toolkit is really helpful for new members of staff and I also give it to families who have relatives here, particularly when they first come to us and they may be finding things difficult."

Dr John Vines, a research associate in Newcastle University's Culture Lab, helped to set up the website. He said: "When we were thinking about the website, we wanted to make it as simple to use as possible. It is very easy to navigate and we've also designed it so people can share their

experiences on there, helping to create a one-stop shop for professional advice and a place where people can learn from one another."

More information: www.dementalk.org.uk/

Provided by Newcastle University

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