

Helping dementia carers make sense of their experiences

August 2 2017



Credit: Cardiff University

A powerful new animation produced by Cardiff University and narrated by Sir Tony Robinson has laid bare the communication difficulties facing people with dementia, in a bid to help carers better understand and support people with the condition.

Based on a decade of research by Professor Alison Wray of the University's School of English, Communication and Philosophy, the animation will help families and professional carers understand why communicating with a person with [dementia](#) can be so challenging.

One of the University's Honorary Fellows, Sir Tony Robinson – who is also an ambassador for Alzheimer's Society and has experience of family dementia - narrates the animation, telling the story of the disorientation and confusion associated with memory loss.

Misunderstandings and frustrations

The animation not only shows how people with dementia have difficulty finding words and struggle to make sense of the world, but also how they develop coping mechanisms, and the onward impact these can have on the messages they express.

It also looks at how their messages are likely to be received and responded to by others, helping carers realise that neither they, nor the person with dementia, are to blame for the many misunderstandings and frustrations that can arise.

Professor Wray said: "Caring for a person with dementia can be very challenging and stressful, and carers, both family and professional, need ideas to help them make sense of what is happening. This animation examines the complexities of interacting with a person with dementia. It looks at the social consequences of the cognitive challenges arising from dementia, but importantly, it also shows how resilient our basic social interactional behaviour is in the face of the condition..."

A more fruitful and less stressful life

The tips for carers featured in the animation include being patient, changing their tone of voice and looking for the reasons behind the words or behaviours of a person with dementia. The animation also shows how carers can empathise with reactions and help people with dementia find the missing information.

Sir Tony Robinson said: "Learning to empathise with someone who has dementia can be hard. But there's always a reason behind a sufferer's apparently nonsensical behaviour and agitated demands. The more we learn to understand them and help meet their needs, the more rewarding our relationship with them can become..."

The animation is available [here](#) and is free to all. It has also been distributed to collaborating care and care-training providers including Wesley Mission Queensland, Six Degrees Salford and Sunrise Senior Living.

Phil McEvoy, Managing Director of Six Degrees Social Enterprise, said: "We have been using the film in our emPoWered Conversations courses for [family carers](#) of people living with dementia. The film is very accessible. The strategies are explained very clearly and they are straightforward to use..."

The animation, based on Professor Wray's research project - The Dynamics of Dementia Communication - was drawn by David Hallangen, and funded by an Impact grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. A second film, also featuring Sir Tony, will be released in the autumn.

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: Helping dementia carers make sense of their experiences (2017, August 2) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-08-dementia-carers.html>

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