

What about when patients leave hospital?

Delirium is distressing for everyone but once the underlying cause for this severe confusion has been treated, the distressing symptoms will usually improve.

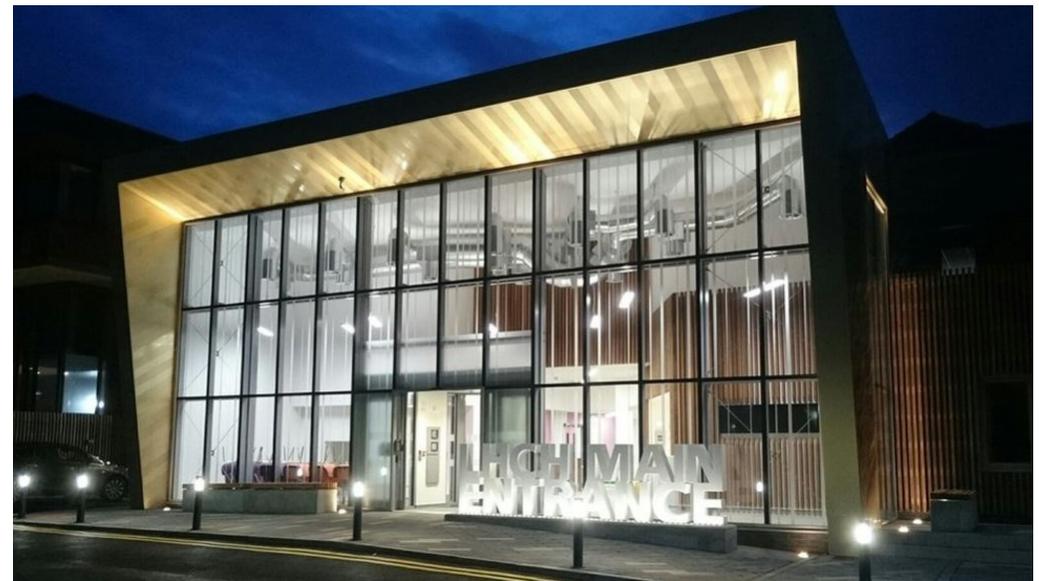
Some patients may still be a little more confused or less able than usual to carry out their daily tasks when they leave the hospital, and in a small number of cases the symptoms do not completely go away. Patients may not remember their time at the hospital or when the delirium occurred. When planning for a patient to leave hospital, we will arrange a follow-up appointment for them and ensure they receive the right level of support, including rehabilitation. Most patients will slowly get better, but if you are concerned, please speak to your GP or our **Outreach Team** (via switchboard) who may be able to provide you with any additional support you may need.

Useful sources of information

- **The Alzheimer's Society** provides advice and support on all forms of dementia.
t: 0300 222 11 22 www.alzheimers.org.uk
- **Carers UK** provides information and support for carers.
t: 020 7378 4999 w: www.carersuk.org
- **Age UK** provides advice, information and support for older people.
t: 0800 678 1174 w: www.ageuk.org.uk

Information for Patients and Families

Delirium



What is delirium?

Delirium, also known as “acute confusional state” is a common condition that usually affects patients’ brains for a very short period of time during illness. In most patients the symptoms generally disappear within six days although some patients may continue to experience one or more symptoms when leaving hospital. A small number of patients (around 5 per cent) may still suffer from delirium for a longer period.

Delirium can cause:

- confusion
- restless behaviour
- sleepiness
- a complete change in personality
- a physical change in the patient’s condition, such as difficulty walking, swallowing or speaking.

Patients with delirium may not recognise even their closest family members which can be very upsetting and difficult to deal with. The patient may become paranoid, developing an extreme and irrational fear or distrust of others, and it is common for patients to have hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there). More than half of patients admitted to hospital become delirious at some time during their stay. Delirium often has many causes, which can make it difficult to recognise and treat. Elderly patients who have been diagnosed with some form of dementia or previous stroke are most at risk for a change in their physical condition; such as difficulty walking, swallowing or speaking. Patients may not remember much of the illness when they are better, and this in itself can be cause for distress.

How can I help someone with delirium?

You can help someone with delirium feel calmer and more in control if you:

- stay calm
- reassure them
- orientate them to time and place
- talk to them in short, simple sentences
- check that they have understood you - repeat things if necessary
- try not to agree with any unusual or incorrect ideas, but tactfully disagree or change the subject
- remind them of what is happening and how they are doing
- make sure they can see a clock or a calendar
- try to make sure that a family member or friend is with them. This is often most important during the evening, when confusion often gets worse
- if they are in hospital, bring in some familiar objects from home
- make sure they have their glasses and hearing aid
- help them to eat and drink
- have a light on at night so that they can see where they are if they wake up