CoProduce Care

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18 Nov 2026

Pain in Care

Behaviour is communication.
Sometimes it is pain.

> Join our Care Sector Call on **Wednesday 18 November, 12.30pm to 2pm**, so you and your team can identify and support the people you care for who are living with pain.

A FREE BRIEFING FOR CARE PROVIDERS

Identifying, supporting and caring for people living with pain

For everyone supporting older people, people living with dementia and people with complex needs

A short look at how common pain is in care, why it is so often missed or not well managed, and the people joining our November Care Sector Call to talk about it.

> *This is not clinical advice. It is supportive information produced by CoProduce Care to help our network and others. Always involve the person's GP, nurse or pharmacist.*

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Written for care providers in England · Shared free with the Care Sector Call Pain in Care, 18 November 2026

THE PROBLEM

Pain hiding in plain sight

Pain is one of the most common things people who draw on care live with, yet it is often missed, played down or not well managed. The risk is greatest for people who can't put it into words. Their pain shows up as refusing care, pacing, calling out or not eating, and too often it is seen as "behaviour" rather than a sign.

6 in 10
people aged 75 and over in the UK live with chronic pain.[1]

Up to 8 in 10
care home residents with dementia have pain, in some studies.[2]

3.8 times
more likely to show agitated behaviour when a person with dementia is in pain.[3]

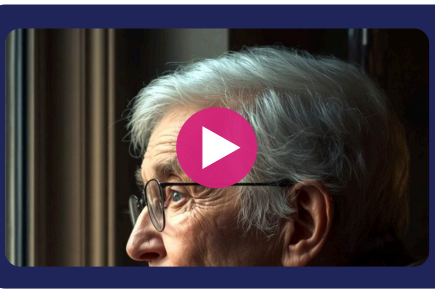
WHY IT GETS MISSED

Not everyone can tell us
Dementia and communication difficulties make it hard to report pain. Pain in care home residents often goes undetected.[4]

Older people play it down
Many deny "pain" but will say they are sore or aching, and pain is wrongly assumed to come with age.[4]

Behaviour gets the wrong label
Unrecognised pain can look like "challenging behaviour", and changes are put down to the person's condition.[5]

Myths and missing training
Some still believe people with learning disabilities feel less pain. They don't. Staff need training to recognise pain and act on it.[4,5]



Watch: how pain might present
See what pain can look like in the people we care for, and how easily it can be mistaken for something else.

Watch this video here

REFERENCES

1. Fayaz A, Croft P, Langford RM, Donaldson LJ, Jones GT. Prevalence of chronic pain in the UK: a systematic review and meta-analysis of population studies. *BMJ Open* 2016;6:e010364. doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010364
2. Helvik A-S, Bergh S, Tevik K. A systematic review of prevalence of pain in nursing home residents with dementia. *BMC Geriatrics* 2023. doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04340-z
3. Atee M, Morris T, Macfarlane S, Cunningham C. Pain in dementia: prevalence and association with neuropsychiatric behaviors. *J Pain Symptom Manage* 2021;61(6):1215-1226.
4. Schofield P (ed). The assessment of pain in older people: UK national guidelines. *Age and Ageing* 2018;47(Suppl 1):i1-i22. doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afx192
5. Public Health England. How social care staff can recognise and manage pain in people with learning disabilities. October 2017. gov.uk (PDF)

THE CARE SECTOR CALL

Join the conversation



About pain

Dr Cathy Stannard

Clinical Lead for Pain Transformation, NHS Gloucestershire ICB

What pain is and why we feel it, why long-term pain is different, why medicines often don't work well for it, and how a person's history and support shape their pain.

Living with pain

Tim Atkinson

Chair, Expert Patient and Carer Committee, British Pain Society

The voice of lived experience: what living with pain is really like, and what people with pain and their carers want care teams to understand.

Pain and dementia

Professor Pat Schofield

Professor of Clinical Nursing, University of Plymouth

Editor of the UK national guidelines on assessing pain in older people. Why pain gets missed in dementia and how to identify it, with examples from her research.

Pain at the end of life

Sophy Gretton, with Nipuna Gunawardena

Consultant in Palliative Medicine, University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS FT

What pain looks like in the last weeks and days of life, avoiding unwanted hospital admissions, and taking the fear out of strong painkillers.

Making pain visible

Denis Repard

Former Chief Executive, Sweet Tree

Building what clinicians know into everyday records as simple prompts and flags, so the signs of pain are noticed, with options for every budget.

Hosted by Sophie Chester-Glyn, CoProduce Care — **Register free on Eventbrite**