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## Caring for confused older patients in general hospitals in the UK: Education and training of health professionals

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**Objective:** In the UK, two-thirds of patients in general hospitals are older than 70, of whom half have dementia or delirium or both. Our objective was to explore health professionals' perceptions of their preparation and ability to care for such confused older patients on general hospital wards.

**Design:** A qualitative study involving semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 60 staff (doctors, nurses and allied health professionals) recruited by a quota sampling strategy. One-to-one interviews were conducted by occupational psychologists with no clinical role in the hospital. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the consensual qualitative research approach.

**Findings:** There was consensus among staff from all professional backgrounds that their education, induction and in-service training left them inadequately prepared and under-confident to care for confused older patients. Communication with these patients was described as challenging, both in terms of patients making their needs known, and staff being able to convey information to patients. Doctors reported challenges in their initial assessments, including the diagnostic features of delirium and dementia. Nurses described handling agitation and aggression as top priorities for training. Participants valued specialist input but reported difficulties gaining such support. Multidisciplinary team meetings were valued but reported as infrequent. Staff reported emotional and behavioural responses including stress, frustration, avoidance, low job satisfaction and empathy.

**Conclusion:** A revision of training across healthcare professions in the UK is indicated, and increased access to specialist support provided, so that the workforce in general hospitals is better prepared to care for increasing numbers of older patients with delirium and dementia.

### Biography

Amanda Griffiths is a Health Professions Council registered Practitioner Psychologist, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist, a Chartered Health Psychologist, and Registered Eupsy Psychologist. She is an Academician and Member of Council of the UK's Academy of Social Sciences, a member of the Academic Forum of Occupational Medicine and Health (UK Faculty of Occupational Medicine), and an affiliate of the Society of Occupational Medicine. She is a Professorial Fellow of the Institute of Mental Health (Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust and the University of Nottingham), a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Special Interest Group on occupational psychiatry (OPSIG), and Expert Occupational Health Advisor to NHS Employers' Working Longer Review Group.

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