**Namaste Care**

People with advanced dementia become very frail as the brain shuts down and they often find it difficult to communicate and interact with other people. This means that they are no longer engaging in the conventional group activities of the care home. As well as being kept well fed, clean and comfortable, people with advanced dementia need to feel loved and they need to express themselves and be recognised as individuals. They need care that enhances their quality of life.

‘Namaste’ is an Indian greeting which means ‘to honour the spirit within’. The care programme includes physical, sensory and emotional elements. The purpose of Namaste Care is to give comfort and pleasure to people with advanced dementia through sensory stimulation, especially the use of touch. The daily Namaste sessions are run by a Namaste Care worker who is a member of the care staff team and are delivered in a designated place within the care home, protected from interruptions and made homely and attractive, so that there is a calm atmosphere.

The core elements of the programme are:

* ‘Honouring the spirit within’: the guiding principle of Namaste Care is a respectful and compassionate approach to individuals with advanced dementia.
* The presence of others: Namaste residents are brought together as a social group with a dedicated Namaste Care worker, so each resident feels ‘included’ in their community.
* Comfort and pain management: comfortable seating and pain assessment/management are the essential first step towards enabling Namaste residents to relax, engage and express how they feel.
* Sensory stimulation: the programme incorporates stimulation of the five senses (touch, hearing, sight, smell, taste). Music, colour, therapeutic touch and massage, aromatherapy oils and food treats are all used.
* Meaningful activity: in Namaste, personal care is provided as a pleasure rather than for hygiene. Hands and face are gently washed with a warm flannel and Moisturising creams are applied. This opportunity is used to make eye contact and talk with the resident.
* Food treats and hydration: the Namaste Care worker offers drinks and food throughout the session (being mindful of any swallowing difficulties). This creates extra opportunities to improve hydration and nutrition and contribute to the residents’ health and well-being
* Care worker education: care workers involved in Namaste receive thorough training and support.
* Family meetings: holding a family meeting when a resident is going to start the Namaste Care programme creates a further bond between the family/friends and the care staff. Families are encouraged to take part in the Namaste sessions when they visit.

None of these core elements are anything new in dementia care. However, what is different is that Namaste brings people with advanced dementia together in a single care programme that provides company and stimulation on a regular basis.

‘The biggest thing Namaste has given me is a different focus when visiting mum. For many years now mum hasn't been able to communicate with us and conversation has been one sided which is difficult and at times she appeared to barely realise I was there. I now know to do other things as well as talk to mum, like show her old photos, brush her hair, feed her treats, and moisturise her face and hands. This makes spending time with her easier and I feel I'm making more of a connection with her and a difference in her life.’ (Email from the daughter of a resident)