



Personality Disorders in the Nursing Home Tip Sheet

1. Personality disorders are life long problems and cause difficulties coping to stress. Residents usually see their difficulties as being an issue for others, not themselves.
2. Personality disorders include many separate types, bunched under three main styles: odd and eccentric, dramatic and erratic, and anxious and fearful.
3. The main treatment for the personality disorder is talk therapy. This will work only if the resident is highly motivated for change. Unfortunately, many long-term care residents, even if willing, are too cognitively impaired to benefit from psychotherapy.
4. The nursing home offers an environment that allows for more control of day-to-day activities and stronger boundaries on behavior. This can make providing services for such patients easier as repetition and routine tend to lessen anxiety.
5. Residents with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder often are emotional and dramatic. They create a great deal of chaos, pitting people against each other. They change emotionally at the drop of a hat. The approach is to set firm limits. Expect an emotional roller coaster, but do not react too strongly yourself.
6. Paranoid personalities tend to be overly suspicious. Comments aimed at caregivers, doctors, family members frequently display distrust. Keeping a distance emotionally is best to prevent resident concerns that you are “luring them in” with kindness just to take advantage of them.
7. Narcissistic personalities believe in being treated better than others. Giving them options is essential, such as what time for bathing, when to schedule a dentist appointment, etc. Sometimes allowing them a “special” status (first served at meals, e.g.) can limit their anger.
8. Dependent personalities require reassurance, but hold them responsible for decisions they have the capacity to make.
9. Antisocial personalities tend to use residents for their own means by their charm and attention to others. Many have histories of marital discord, job loss, substance use and even jail time. Maintaining a distance between them and vulnerable residents is essential.
10. The stress of long-term care can bring these traits out more fully. Having a trusted staff member available for weekly meetings to discuss stressors can be helpful in reducing such stress.
11. Please consider involving the Ombudsman early if a personality disorder resident is causing a great deal of disruption.

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