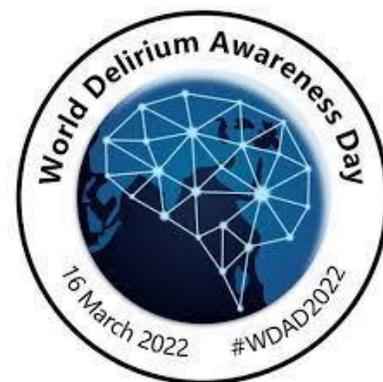


KEY MESSAGES - DELIRIUM

March 16, 2022 is World Delirium Awareness Day. The following is a list of key messages¹ that could be delivered to seniors, caregivers, health care providers or the public.

- Delirium is a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY** that requires immediate attention. It is often a sign of serious disease in seniors and needs to be identified and managed quickly.
- Delirium (or acute confusion) is a **sudden change** that causes confusion and uncharacteristic behaviours. Caregivers often describe a sudden change in thinking, memory or personality.
- While there are several **key signs/symptoms**, screening focuses on four key areas:
 - Fluctuations in presentation and behaviours (confusion and behaviours fluctuate over the course of a day)
 - Inattention (difficulty focusing and concentrating)
 - Disorganized thinking (rambling, incoherent speech, unpredictable switching of subjects)
 - Altered level of consciousness (hyperactive, hypoactive)
- Delirium is **often not detected, or misdiagnosed** as dementia or depression. Systematic screening and prompt assessment are important. Early diagnosis and treatment offer the best chance of recovery.
- There are **three types** of delirium: hyperactive (restless, agitated), hypoactive (drowsy, lethargic) and mixed. The most frequently underdiagnosed is hypoactive delirium.
- Delirium often has a **multifactorial etiology** with predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors.
- Delirium **can often be prevented**. Awareness of its potentially modifiable risk factors is key to prevention.
- Delirium **can often be reversed** with proper assessment and treatment by an interdisciplinary team.
- **Stats:**
 - Up to 75% of older adults experience delirium after acute illness or surgery. It is very common in hospital settings - 1/3 medical and hip fracture patients; 1/2 ICU patients.
 - 75% will recover from delirium in days/week. 25% will have persistent delirium that may last for months and, in some cases, never resolve.



¹ References: [Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto: Senior Friendly Care \(sfCare\) Tools](#); [Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health: Delirium Tools Clinician Pocket Card](#)