Delirium

Delirium is severe confusion that can occur as a side effect of medicines, with illness or after surgery. Delirium is often temporary and can be treated even in those with a serious illness.

Signs

Signs can occur suddenly over hours or days. You may see these signs:

- Lack of attention
- Problems with memory or thinking
- Changes in behavior
- Loss of consciousness at times
- Anxiety, anger or depression
- Sleeping and waking problems
- Problems with speech
- Seeing or hearing things that are not real called hallucinations

Treatment

Delirium can lead to more medical problems, longer hospital stays and nursing home care after discharge. To prevent these outcomes, it is important for the patient to be checked closely. An exam and tests will be done to find the cause of delirium. The cause will be treated.

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To improve your loved one’s condition, medicines may be reduced or stopped. Our staff will work with your loved one to reduce the confusion and improve memory by controlling the patient’s environment. These actions include:

- Have a family member present.
- Limit changes in caregivers.
- Limit moves from one room to another.
- Reduce noise.
- Provide eyeglasses or hearing aids.
- Leave dim lights on at night.
- Provide a clock, a calendar and a window view.
- Distraction with food or activity.
- Bed exit alarms
- Frequent checks by staff

If these actions are not enough to protect the patient from harming him or herself or others, a restraint may be used to prevent:

- Falling from bed or chair
- Pulling out needed tubes for care
- Removing bandages
- Wandering or climbing

**With care, delirium will improve over time.**

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.