

## DEMENTIA, SEX AND WELLBEING: Person-centred approaches and conversations



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### Abstract

Our efforts to create services, relationships and environments which encourage and sustain “wellbeing” (Kitwood 1997) often miss an essential aspect of our humanity. That of our sexuality. How does the experience of cognitive and functional change associated with a dementia affect our most private and intimate selves?

Living with a dementia brings with it not only changes in cognition, emotion, behaviour and self-confidence, self-esteem and fatigue, but also altered levels of libido, and functionality of genitalia. Given that the biggest sex organ is the brain, it is important to have an appreciation for how sexuality is affected by brain changes associated with a dementia.

Within the care setting, as elsewhere, it is not an easy topic of conversation to navigate, especially if a current partner, adult children or elderly parents become involved. Ensuring an open, truly person-centred and holistic approach to the most intimate yet most common means of human relating, self-affirmation and stress relief is essential to promoting wellbeing.

How is living with a dementia influenced by age, ageism and sexual and gender discrimination of all types? An important aspect of adult functioning and relationships, sex receives the least attention as it is often seen as too ‘personal’ or ‘private’, ‘intrusive’ or ‘disrespectful’ to talk about to our ‘elders’ or our peers or juniors living with a dementia.

This presentation will give an overview of the topic and demonstrate, through case studies based on the author’s experiences as a psychotherapist and trainer, how person-centred approaches and conversations can create new opportunities regarding sexuality, sensuality, intimacy and relationships that can initiate and maintain wellbeing, thus enhancing the lived experience of dementia.

### Biography

Danuta Lipinska, MA, RegMBACP (Accred) Author of two ground-breaking books on dementia has pioneered counselling with persons with dementia. A qualified nurse, she has a BA in Psychology and Master’s Degree in Counselling from the University of New Hampshire, USA where she created training programmes and designed and ran family support groups. She has developed specialist counselling services for people with dementia and relatives and continues to be highly involved in this area of expertise. Recently she was a tutor on the Post-graduate Diploma in Person-centred Counselling at the Norwich Centre for Counselling. Patron of The Forget Me Nots, a Cognitive Stimulation Therapy Group in Norwich, Danuta is a counsellor, supervisor, author and an international speaker.

### Publication

1. Kitwood, T. (1997) “Dementia Reconsidered: The Person Comes First.” Buckingham: Open University Press.
2. Lipinska, D. (2009) “Person-centred Counselling for People with Dementia: Making Sense of Self.” Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
3. Lipinska, D. (2017) “Dementia, Sex and Wellbeing. A Person-Centred Guide for People Living with Dementia, Their Partners, Caregivers and Professionals” Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

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