

Headlines like this in my local paper are not uncommon: "Can you help police find missing dementia sufferer Arthur?" (*Stoke Sentinel*, 12 August 2017). When a person with dementia goes missing, it is a traumatic time for both family and care professionals.

The Herbert Protocol is an early intervention scheme designed to help locate "vulnerable people" and pays specific attention to people deemed at risk of going missing. Norfolk police introduced the scheme in care homes after war veteran George Herbert, who lived with dementia, sadly died while missing from his care home in 2011. George had gone in search of his childhood home.

Since then the scheme has been gathering momentum nationally and its impact is widening. For example, Helena Goodwin, partnership lead for delivery with Essex council and a member of Essex Lowland Search and Rescue team, distributed the Herbert Protocol document to over 400 care homes in preparation for its formal launch last October. And in several other counties across the UK, nursing and care home staff, police, the charity Lowland Rescue, and organisations such as Dementia Action Alliance are working in partnership to raise the profile of the protocol.

UK police received 321,992 calls related to missing persons, according to figures covering the year 2014/15 (UK Missing Persons Bureau 2015). Three per cent of these calls concerned people with dementia-related conditions - 1,073 people in all. Out of this total 535 were 60-79 years old (the largest category) while a further 416 were over 80 years old. Dementia also affects younger people, of course, and the police recorded 58 calls concerning adults under the age of 59 years old.

■ Rachel Good is senior lecturer in social care at Wolverhampton University and a team member and trustee at Staffordshire Search and Rescue.

# The Herbert Protocol for people at risk

**Rachel Good** describes an early intervention scheme designed to help locate vulnerable people deemed to be at risk of going missing



For people living with dementia, the risks of harm while missing are considerable. Deteriorating weather conditions, cold seasons, unsuitable clothing, age and frailty, limited mobility, confusion, length of time missing, exposure to environmental hazards and dangers such as reservoirs, lakes, rivers, canals, and traffic, all contribute to risk of harm and risk of death.

Alzheimer's Society (2015) estimates up to 60% of people living with dementia will "wander" outdoors at some point in the course of their condition. The term "wandering" is commonly used to describe the walking behaviour of a person with dementia, but the term is considered unhelpful (Loveday 2012) because it implies aimless wandering with little purpose or reason - and this is not the case.

For example, walking and exercise may be an important part of a person's life, giving purpose and a sense of well-being (Bantry White & Montgomery 2015). Some people may walk to relieve boredom or because of a lack of physical activity, agitation and restlessness. Walking about may be a symptom of emotional distress or a way of relieving anxiety (Qazi *et al* 2003). Memory loss, confusion and searching for the past may also drive an individual to walk outdoors to seek comfort and familiarity in their surroundings.

So paying attention to the walking behaviour of a person with dementia may uncover underlying needs to be met and

issues to be addressed in order to improve wellbeing and quality of life. Promoting greater involvement in leisure activities and social groups can be a solution.

Most missing people are located within 24 hours, or simply return home having experienced no harm from what is now termed their "missing journey" (Stevenson *et al* 2013). But some may no longer have the ability to orientate themselves and find their way back home safely. Alzheimer's Society research (2015) found that 40% of people with dementia had become lost while walking outside.

## How can practitioners respond?

Many people still believe that you must wait 24 hours to report a loved one missing. This is not true. In missing persons' investigations "safeguarding" is the key concept at the heart of effective risk assessment. Defined by the Department of Health (2016, para 14.7) as "protecting an adult's right to live in safety", the concept is central to an expedient and accurate police response. It is important that practitioners act quickly and help police understand the nature of the person's particular

vulnerabilities.

Completing the Herbert Protocol form should be part of an individual's needs assessment and care planning process when they are deemed at risk of going missing. Identifying this group involves asking if the person has gone missing before, if they become disoriented or lost during outdoor activities, or if there are concerns about their safety and welfare while they are walking outdoors alone.

The form can also be completed by any relative, carer, or member of care home staff, and involves gathering information about things like current and past lifestyle and places frequented, helping to paint a picture of the person's possible movements and location should they go missing. It should take no longer than an hour to complete and, wherever possible, the individual concerned should be involved in providing the information.

Filling out the form in this way can reduce some of the distress families, carers and staff often feel when a missing incident occurs, which can be exacerbated by having to answer the many questions asked by the police. When the Herbert Protocol is used, the information needed to find the person is already to hand and the search can begin without delay.

## Using the information

Multi-agency working between care professionals, local police and in some cases volunteers from Lowland Rescue is key to locating missing adults quickly. Lowland Rescue is a national

### Who is defined as "missing"?

"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."

*From Missing People 2016*

charity equivalent in skills and expertise to the better known Mountain Rescue. There are 36 Lowland Rescue teams covering a third of the UK, consisting of 1,800 members and 35 search and rescue dogs.

Trained searchers use evidence-informed techniques and are called “search technicians”. They are skilled in navigation and map reading, first aid, technical rope work and crime scene preservation. A memorandum of

understanding between the police and the rescue service establishes clear lines of communication and enables the search technicians and (in some areas) search dogs to be requested immediately.

In areas not served by Lowland Rescue, the police will undertake the physical search for the individual or they may call on the help of the neighbouring rescue teams, Mountain Rescue or other national resources. For example, Staffordshire Search and Rescue has three air-scenting search dogs that can be deployed nationally if required.

In 2016, search technicians collectively searched 82,794 square kilometres of woodland, moorland, farmland, towns and cities across the UK to rescue missing people considered to be vulnerable and at high risk of harm. One fifth of the 883 searches carried out in total were for adults living with dementia-related conditions, men having been reported missing more than women. The majority were found uninjured and 18 per cent of those sought had gone missing from a care home (Lowland Rescue 2017).

Search operations employ scenario-based methods, which involve considering the potential reasons why a person is missing, their physical abilities, emotional state and



Trained Lowland Rescue searchers can be requested immediately

any other factors that may aid the search strategy. It is also standard practice to consult spatial profile data, a statistical analysis of police records capturing information about previous locations to which the individual has travelled and the distance covered. These data are then correlated with the missing person by type and category, for example age, gender, risk and specific vulnerabilities.

Searchers can formulate more effective search plans when these methods are combined with information from the Herbert Protocol. Police may request information about the person’s dementia type, symptoms, what they were wearing, their mobility and physical fitness, how long they have been missing, what their emotional state was before going missing, and where they were last seen. Once a person has returned home safely, care workers should update the Herbert Protocol document to record the place where they were found in case they go missing again.

Lowland Rescue teams have noted many wider benefits from the Herbert Protocol. For example, Norfolk Search and Rescue visits local care homes regularly to promote the protocol and build strong working relationships. Trevor Vidler, from Hampshire Search and Rescue, reports that 369 Herbert Protocol forms have been downloaded from their website since the initiative was introduced in the area just over a year ago. And Essex Search

and Rescue says that the public have downloaded over 600 of the forms from its website since August.

stronger working relationships, improved communication and enhanced multi-agency working on safeguarding. ■

#### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Peter Simcock, senior lecturer at Staffordshire University, and Joss Presland, search manager with Staffordshire Search and Rescue, for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. She would also like to thank Lowland Rescue and the search and rescue team members highlighted in the article for their contributions.

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#### Search information

- Medical conditions
- Places frequented
- Mobile phone number
- Past interests and hobbies
- Previous addresses
- Up-to-date photo

#### Resources

You can find out more about the Herbert Protocol on several police websites, including the Norfolk police website at [www.norfolk.police.uk/advice/personal-safety/missing-people](http://www.norfolk.police.uk/advice/personal-safety/missing-people). Factsheets about what to do if someone you know goes missing are available on the UK Missing Persons Bureau website at <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/factsheets-for-families>. The charity Missing People helps families and friends cope with practical issues and the distress of having a loved one missing. See the website at [www.missingpeople.org.uk](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk)

To find out more about Lowland Rescue in your area visit [www.lowlandrescue.org](http://www.lowlandrescue.org)

Local leisure and social activities which may help to avoid risky walking behaviour can be found at [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk) and [www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org)