

Helen, 75 years Admission

Helen is a 75 year old lady of Italian origin, referred by GP with a 6 month history of increasing persecutory ideas and recent threats to neighbours with a knife. Both Helen's daughter Maria, and her GP, describe a twelve month history of personality change with increased irritability and reduced interest in the activities of her grandchildren. Six months ago she started accusing her neighbour of stealing her mail. Five months ago she started yelling at her neighbour at night and putting extra locks on her doors. In the last 3 months she has begun to accuse the neighbour of trying to kill her. She rarely leaves the house, telling family not to visit or they may be hurt. They do not understand Helen's behaviour and are reluctant to "get involved in mum's business".

This morning Helen rushed out of her house and started waving a knife at her neighbour's house and screaming "don't call me a slut". No one was in the neighbour's house and Helen quickly went back inside. She has done this a number of times over the last two weeks. This behaviour prompted her husband to call her GP, who called the Aged Care Psychiatry Team. They interviewed her and, while she described her mood as "normal", she said that life didn't give her much pleasure and that she just didn't have the energy to do things. She says that she has been eating and sleeping well. She complains she has had some difficulty concentrating and recently had a minor car accident. She says that sometimes she is forgetful but "what would you expect of a woman my age". However, Helen believes her only problem is her neighbour trying to harm her. She has no past history of violence but feels she may have to defend herself if her neighbour attacks her.

She lives at home with her husband who has been wheelchair bound with severe arthritis for many years. He is not happy with her behaviour but indicates that as long as he does not challenge her about what she thinks, "things are OK". He indicates that she is not keeping up with the housework and she is not as good a cook as she used to be; but he says that Helen mostly pays all the bills by mail and he doesn't think that any are overdue. He complains that she has started drinking more than she used to. Although she drives to the local corner store once a week to shop, she rarely leaves the house at any other time. Helen was an active member of the Italian Community and the Catholic Church but has not participated in any community activities in over a year.