

# CASE STUDY

## *The Transformation of the Dementia Care Unit*

### IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Ruthven Ward at New Craigs Hospital was originally designed for younger adults with acute mental health needs, not for patients with advanced dementia. The environment was no longer fit for purpose: confusing corridors, poor wayfinding, and a lack of dementia-friendly features heightened the risk of falls and distress.

Staff faced daily challenges in delivering personal care, while families raised concerns about safety and comfort. The ward required extensive redevelopment to meet the complex needs of its 24 residents.

### THE CHALLENGE ON THE GROUND

The outdated design created multiple difficulties. Narrow bedroom doors prevented safe evacuation of bed-bound patients. Inadequate showering facilities left staff struggling with basic care tasks. Patients experienced distress from frequent disruptions and a lack of privacy, while visitors worried about safety when wandering patients entered others' rooms. Instead of supporting recovery, the environment increased confusion and anxiety. Meanwhile, an improvement notice for patient safety risks had been issued, adding further pressure on NHS Highland.

### HOW WE RESPONDED

With an investment from the charity of £350,000, the ward underwent a major refurbishment to create a dedicated dementia-friendly unit. NHS Highland funded essential safety works and core maintenance work, while charitable funding enabled enhancements that transformed both patient and staff experience.

Key elements included:

- **Interior design strategy:** Calming colour contrasts, wall murals, and reminiscence features supported orientation and comfort.
- **Destination seating:** Rest areas were introduced along corridors to reduce anxiety and encourage safe exploration.



- **Kwikscreen segregation:** Flexible screens created circular movement routes, reducing confusion and dead ends.
- **Assisted bathing and showering:** A new assisted shower room complemented an Arjo bath, giving patients greater choice and ensuring dignified care.
- **Improved signage and wayfinding:** Personalised door signs and clear directional cues helped patients navigate the ward with confidence.

### THE CHANGE WE ACHIEVED

- **For Staff:** Staff work in a safer, more efficient environment that supports compassionate care. The new design reduces physical strain in tasks such as bathing and makes interventions less distressing for patients. Improved working conditions are also intended to boost morale, retention, and job satisfaction.
- **For Patients:** Patients benefit from a calmer, safer, and more dignified environment. Falls, confusion, and agitation will reduce through better wayfinding and circular movement routes. Meaningful social spaces and activity areas encourage engagement and recovery. Enhanced bathing facilities support dignity and comfort.
- **For NHS Highland:** The redevelopment created a facility aligned with best practice dementia care. The ward now supports quicker recovery, reduced reliance on medication, and fewer bed days per patient, improving efficiency across services while meeting safety standards.

### THE JOURNEY AHEAD

The ward now stands as a model of what can be achieved when design, research, and compassionate care come together — ensuring patients with advanced dementia receive the dignity, comfort, and safety they deserve. [Read more here.](#)

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*“The unit is a transformative space that represents our commitment to compassionate, patient-centred care. This facility not only improves the environment for our patients but also provides crucial support for our dedicated staff, enabling them to deliver the highest standard of care. With the Highland Health Board Charity's invaluable support, we are ensuring that our hospital environment is at the forefront of dementia care.”*

– Fiona Davies, Chief Executive of NHS Highland