

Box 2: Sample questions in delirium assessment which may help avoid or minimise interview-related distress

Consider starting by asking the patient about their sleep:

- “How have you been sleeping?”
- “Have you had any vivid dreams?”

Then:

- “Have you experienced any dream-like feelings that might have persisted while awake?”

Depending on the patient’s response, it may be appropriate to broach the issue of hallucinations:

- “Sometimes when people are in hospital, they experience things that are puzzling or see things that aren’t there. Has this been happening to you?” (then reassure)

And/or delusions:

- “What sorts of things have you been worrying about?”
- “Are you afraid anyone here is against you in any way?”
- “Do you feel safe here?”

When formally testing cognition, starting by saying something like:

- “I’m going to ask you some questions to assess your thinking and concentration. Some of the questions are straightforward, others might be more tricky. It doesn’t matter if you get them right or wrong; no-one is expected to get all of them correct. The answers will help me understand more about your health.”

Months of the Year Backwards can be quite a complex instruction to give, especially if the patient has dementia. By demonstrating it, often people understand and can then do it. For example:

- “You know the months of the year, January, February, March, all the way to December. I’d like you recite them to me, BUT in reverse order, starting from December. For example, December, November, and so on.”