

## QUESTION 2

### **HOW SHOULD I ANSWER MY WIFE WHEN SHE ASKS ME, 'WHAT IS IT THAT I'VE GOT? I'M NOT GOING BONKERS, AM I?'**

There is a short letter at the beginning of the book which is addressed to the person with dementia. The key points it makes are that the person with dementia, i.e. your wife, knows only too well that she is experiencing something over and above the normal problems of ageing. She is first asking for a name to be put to her condition, (in our experience people vary enormously in their choice of phrase), and she is also asking for reassurance that she is not going to go down the dementia drain. Once you have the book in your hand, you are well-placed to agree some sort of name for the condition which is acceptable to your wife. You can then explain that something called 'SPECAL' is what is needed. When asked what SPECAL is all about, you can authentically describe SPECAL as an approach which sees her as the expert in knowing what it is like to have the condition; and that SPECAL helps other people to understand what she is going through and what they need to do to help. The important steps for her are to feel reassured that there is something positive and lasting to be done; that her past memory will remain relatively intact and useful; that she needs to appoint the person she most trusts to read the book and can then look forward to getting on with the life she had always hoped to lead.

This is the conversational approach we use when clients at Burford ask us this sort of question. The classic reply tends to be along the lines of: 'Well, that's good: I will just get on with my life and forget about the dementia. After all, I am becoming pretty good at forgetting, so I don't see much problem!'