Dementia strategy: a four country approach

Our experts anticipate what the National Dementia Strategy for England will mean for dementia services in the UK

**England**
The consultation document on the National Dementia Strategy (Department of Health 2008) defined three broad areas for action:
- Improving awareness.
- Early diagnosis and intervention.
- High quality care and support.

Although the influence and intervention of nurses and nursing is not explicit in the document, nurses will have a major role in delivering the strategy. As the largest professional staff group, much of the success or failure of the strategy is in our hands.

A core message of the strategy is to reduce the stigma of dementia. If stigma is tackled through public campaigns and staff training, the potential for improving diagnosis and standards of care and support will readily follow. Much of the resistance to diagnose is founded in the stigma of the dementia label.

Similarly, many nurses and care staff do not define dementia care as within their repertoire of skills due to a perception that caring for those with mental illness is the job of others.

As clinical leaders and role models, nurses are responsible for sending out positive messages about people with dementia to the public, to fellow nurses and to members of multi-agency teams. The strategy emphasises that working with people with dementia and their families is core to the skill set of health and social care professionals, wherever you work.

Delivery of the strategy depends on the drive of leaders in older people’s nursing, such as those who read this journal. It is our responsibility to put this strategy on all agendas and ensure that it is read and acted on. It is our responsibility to persistently and consistently challenge damaging attitudes, systems and environments. It is our responsibility to ensure that we sell the messages in the strategy so that when the recommendations are achieved:

- We will greatly improve the quality of life and health for people with dementia and their carers.
- We will ensure that when people with dementia use health and social services they do so in a timely, efficient and cost-effective way.

No longer is dementia care a nursing backwater, but a dynamic and rapidly changing specialty.

**Scotland**
In 2004 the Scottish Executive examined the planning, organisation and delivery of coherent services for those with dementia and their carers. Accompanying this was a planning and audit tool for the design of dementia services. It identified critical obstacles to improving dementia services:
- Lack of effective, integrated planning and service delivery.
- Negative attitudes to dementia.
- Problems of receiving a diagnosis and entering the system.
- Lack of adequate data about needs, levels of service provision and a requirement to think creatively beyond what is available.

The document made 12 recommendations which all related to removing these obstacles. They included:
- Joint planning, commissioning and management of services with local authority partners.
- Training programmes for those who care for people with dementia and their carers.
- Development of integrated care pathways (ICPs).
- Information.
- Data collection.

From April 2008, the Scottish government identified early detection and management of patients with dementia as a Health Efficiency Access and Treatment target. Each NHS board has been set a target of increasing early detection of dementia by one third. Mental health has received a high profile in the Scottish government health department. *Delivering for Mental Health* (Scottish Executive 2006a) and *Rights, Relationships and Recovery* (Scottish Executive 2006b) are the main policy drivers. Some of the work that is being progressed in Scotland because of this includes:
- NHS boards developing ICPs for mental health, one of which is dementia.
- Dementia registers in each GP practice.
- Each NHS board has accredited auditors to advise on the suitability of existing and new NHS facilities.
- A dementia improvement programme was undertaken in collaboration with the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC) and NHS Forth Valley, funded by the Scottish government. This focused on improving care and reducing unnecessary admissions. Training was provided to staff working with people with dementia. An outcome report has been published (DSDC 2008).
- Dementia champions have been trained in 50 care homes supported by Alzheimer Scotland.