MEMORY SERVICES OPENED ACROSS ENGLAND

Making a difference

Pioneered by our researchers, ‘memory services’ are being opened across England to give people with early signs of dementia easy access to health and social care professionals.

‘Memory services’ give people who may have early signs of dementia easy access to health and social care professionals. They can make a diagnosis, explain what that diagnosis means and make sure appropriate treatment and support is organised. This allows people to have more control over their lives and gives them and their families time to come to terms with the situation and plan for the future.

Memory services are based on The Croydon Memory Service in south London which was pioneered and evaluated by our researchers. When this service was developed, most people who had dementia were not being diagnosed early.

‘The earlier people are diagnosed with dementia, the better,’ says Professor Banerjee. ‘A diagnosis allows people to get treatment early and then throughout the course of their illness. A diagnosis allows people to control their own lives and make their own choices. It gives them time to come to terms with the situation and plan for the future. An early diagnosis means we can provide people and their families the information they need to make informed decisions about their care.’

An evaluation published in 2007 showed that after the Croydon Memory Service had opened its doors, substantially more people, from all backgrounds, were given a diagnosis of dementia.

Ongoing research also demonstrated the clinical and cost-effectiveness of the service. ‘Memory services enable people to be supported in their own homes rather than to be admitted to residential care,’ said Professor Banerjee. ‘People have an improved quality of life – not just those with dementia, but their families as well.’

The creation of a national network of memory services inspired by the Croydon template became central to England’s first ever five-year National Dementia Strategy for England, produced in 2009.

A 2011 report from the NHS Information Centre showed there had already been widespread investment in specially commissioned memory services. But in March 2012, Prime Minister David Cameron re-iterated the Government’s commitment to opening a memory service in every neighbourhood in England in his ‘dementia challenge’.

Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia document – delivering major improvements in dementia care and research by 2015 – says one in three people over the age of 65 will develop dementia. In England in 2012, 670,000 people had dementia, equivalent to the combined populations of Bristol and Leicester. This number will double in the 30 years after 2012.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has launched the Memory Services National Accreditation Programme to make sure the quality of memory clinics across England is uniformly high. Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia document says the Government will encourage all memory clinics to become accredited under this scheme.

The importance of the Croydon Memory Service blueprint was acknowledged when Professor Banerjee was presented with the ‘2010 Alzheimer’s Award’ by Fondation Médéric Alzheimer and Alzheimer’s Disease International (ADI). ‘Anyone who wants to improve dementia care in their community should learn from the Croydon Memory Service model,’ said Marc Wortmann, executive director of ADI. ‘Together with improved rates of high quality, early diagnosis of dementia, memory services have provided the recruiting base for clinical trials of potential disease modifying treatments for Alzheimer’s disease.’

Research led by Professors Sube Banerjee & Robert Howard

REFERENCES


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