

# Our focus on dementia

## The importance of an early diagnosis

It is critical for those living with dementia to get an early diagnosis. It enables a plan of care to be established that helps the person live well.

*Jon Weatherhead at Dementia UK talks to The Good Care Group.*

### A condition that affects all the family.

People often ask “what is the point of diagnosing someone with dementia when nothing can be done”. Without further information and support this would seem a valid point. However, obtaining a diagnosis can make a significant difference, not just for the individual with suspected dementia, but also for the whole family. The condition and the challenges it presents can affect the individual and their loved ones, therefore an early diagnosis is highly recommended so an optimum plan of care can be put in place.

At Dementia UK, our Admiral Nursing DIRECT national helpline is manned by specialist dementia care nurses. Our Admiral Nurses are frequently asked how to obtain a diagnosis? Indeed many have tried but often say their GP has told them it's just a part of getting old and nothing can be done. This can leave the family in a state of frustration and flux at not knowing what is happening, especially when they see obvious changes in a loved one's behaviour or memory. Dementia is not simply a part of getting old!

### Obtaining a diagnosis

Make sure you persist with your GP and request a referral to the Older Adults Mental Health Team. They will perform an assessment and will provide



“*diagnosis can help to make sense of all the changes people may have been seeing..*”

a diagnosis. However, dementia can be a bit of a strange illness to diagnose, it relies as much on eliminating other possible causes of changes as actually formally diagnosing the condition itself. Indeed, there may well be other reasons for someone having memory or behaviour changes, so it is vital to have this explored in order to treat any other possible reasons for such changes.

People often get confused over the term dementia. We hear people say “I have Alzheimer's disease, but I don't have dementia”. In actual fact dementia is merely an umbrella term covering over a hundred forms of problems with cognition and memory impairment, of which Alzheimer's is the most common form. Other common forms of dementia include vascular dementia, fronto temporal dementia (or picks disease) and dementia with lewy bodies.

### So, what are the benefits of diagnosis?

Firstly it opens up the door to Specialist Dementia Services: Admiral Nurses where available, Social Services and local memory clinics. The possibility of treatments and medicines to slow the illness down and reduce risk factors also become an option as do voluntary services (for example charities) and services within the private sector, where we are seeing a major growth also help meet the needs of families and carers. The Good Care Group being an excellent example of an organisation who support

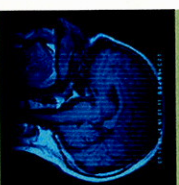
“*... obtaining a diagnosis can make a significant difference, not just for the individual with suspected dementia, but also for the whole family.*”

individuals living with dementia in their own homes and one we often suggest to people who contact us looking for quality specialist help at home.

Secondly, diagnosis can help to make sense of all the changes people may have been seeing for some time but couldn't quite explain or understand.

Finally, for many a quite important benefit is the access to financial assistance. If dementia is diagnosed, the person is entitled to Attendance Allowance, a weekly benefit to help pay towards extra care for example. Also the person is exempt from paying Council Tax or if living with someone with dementia there is a 25% reduction in Council Tax on the household. A carer may be entitled to Carers Allowance, though this benefit is means tested, whereas Attendance Allowance is available to everyone with dementia regardless of finances.

Diagnosis is just the starting point of what for many can be a difficult journey ahead. However with the right help and support that journey can be made much easier, and improve the quality of life for the whole family.



“*... a complete pathway for patients with memory problems and cognitive impairment.*”

### Collaborating with experts in dementia care

A's part of our commitment to delivering the very highest standards of care in the home to those living with dementia, The Good Care Group aim to collaborate with other organisations who can deliver benefits to our clients and have synergies with what we offer.

ReCognition Health, like us are passionate about improving the lives of those living with dementia, their families and carers. ReCognition brings together at their Harley Street centre a group of expert clinical specialists who have decided to work together to provide a complete pathway for patients with memory problems and cognitive impairment. They provide a high quality quick assessment, diagnosis and management service to those experiencing early symptoms of any type of cognitive impairment and neurodegenerative diseases including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and MS to name a few. In addition they provide their service to those who have suffered a traumatic brain injury or sports injury.

ReCognition has been created to ensure quality care can be put in place as early as possible to ensure optimum health of the person living with dementia following diagnosis. The team will provide these patients with guidance on on-going management and care of the condition, which includes how they will be cared for at home following diagnosis. This compliments The Good Care Groups approach of delivering the SPECIAL method and other best practice techniques as early as possible in an individual's dementia journey. Through this collaboration we are able to offer the ReCognition service to our existing clients who may be suffering with mild cognitive impairment or memory loss, but require a quick, quality assessment and diagnosis.

For more information please visit: [www.re-cognitionhealth.com](http://www.re-cognitionhealth.com)

**Dementia UK**

Improving quality of life