

Admiral Nurses in Medway celebrate a decade of helping people with dementia

Being diagnosed with dementia can be devastating, not only for the sufferer but also for the wider family as well. "Dementia" is an umbrella term which covers a number of different conditions from vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease to Lewy Body dementia.

According to the Alzheimer's Research Trust, there are some 820,000 dementia sufferers in the UK and this is set to rise to over one million people by 2025. The progression of each condition varies and can be quite difficult to diagnose. Celebrity sufferers such as author Terry Pratchett and musician Glen Campbell have helped raise awareness over recent years, but there is still a great deal to be done.

Julia Burton-Jones works as a pioneer for Dementia UK. Commissioned by Age Concern, she wrote, 'Find the Right Care Home' in 2008. Having been involved in the field most of her working life, it's fair to say this is an area Julia feels passionately about. She said, "Dementia UK is a national charity, committed to improving the quality of life for all people affected by dementia. The charity works in partnership with lots of different organisations like mental health trusts, universities and local authorities. The charity has four central areas which are: the provision of specialist dementia nurses – Admiral Nurses; Admiralty Nursing Direct, where those in need can access expert advice over the telephone, a support network Uniting Carers; and Dementia UK Training which provides high quality training for care staff."

Both the person with dementia and their families can be afraid of and anxious about what the future holds. Caring for a loved one can be very rewarding, yet can also be emotionally exhausting and frightening, leaving both the sufferer and the carer bewildered. Admiral Nurses are mental health nurses who specialise in dementia care, to improve the experience of those affected by dementia. Importantly, the emphasis here is on not only the sufferer, but also those around them. Julia said, "Admiral Nurses work with the wider family. It's very difficult for people to decide when the time is right to look for a care home, for example. Admiral Nurses can help with both the practical and the emotional aspects



Julia Burton-Jones

Photo by Louise Whiffin

of things like this. For a long time there has been a lot of vagueness around dementia. It can be glossed over with terms like "losing your marbles" or made impenetrably difficult by medial expressions like "progressive neurological impairment". Admiral Nurses can help advise people at a time when they are vulnerable and sometimes very sad or even depressed because, in many ways, dementia is like a long bereavement for family and friends."

One of the most compelling reasons to work with an Admiral Nurse is that often they can help the affected person to stay in their own home for longer. It is not unusual for dementia sufferers to deteriorate rapidly if they are hospitalised. Staying in their own familiar home can often be better for them. Julia said, "Admiral Nurses can help navigate friends and family around complex situations and help identify what is likely to be the best solution. The pressure is often seen in the deterioration of relationships or even the health of the carer. They are trained to help with the stress and difficulties people experience as carers."

People often misunderstand dementia and incorrectly assume that the sufferer has lost the ability to think. Julia explained, "Often, the sufferer will retain their feelings and emotions, and a variety of things may resonate with them. People retain their capacity for feelings of well-being in relationships that are supportive. As a society we need to understand that numbers will increase as we

have an increasing population of older people. In the Bible, older people are revered. We must remember to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve."

Admiral Nurses can help a sufferer decide what kind of end of life care they want and this can be done in consultation with family. This issue of capacity can leave a black hole and the experience can be hideous for family and friends trying to manage the process. Where hospices once catered for cancer end of life care, many people are now dying with dementia and home care or hospice care may be right for them. Julia said, "This Government has four priorities in this area. They are: Better diagnosis; better care in care homes; better care in hospitals; and the reduced use of anti-psychotics. There is still a lot of work to be done, and we really need greater awareness of the challenges surrounding dementia as a nation."

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In the Hands of the Lord

Self supporting minister (SSM) Jean Budgeon arrived in the UK from South Africa in February 2010, just in time to see the end of the coldest English winter on record for the past 100 years! She said, "I was originally deaconed in South Africa on 16 December 2003, where it is compulsory for a priest to retire at 64. I was only a year off that, so I stayed as a Deacon. My husband died in 1993 and I came to the UK because I have a daughter and grandchildren here. It's quite a hard thing to do, because you have to leave all of your friends behind."

Priested by Bishop James in 2011, Jean said, "I belong to the Lord. The Rev Canon Ruth Oates encouraged me here and put

me in touch with the Rev Glyn Ackerley. That was it! I didn't hear anything for a while and then it was decided that I could be priested at Swanscombe. Amazingly, and without me knowing, some of my parishoners from South Africa attended the service! It was wonderful! I don't know how to express it really – it was very personal – just you the Lord and the people. I understand that the Diocese is going to change the way Ordinations happen next year and make them more local to the people concerned. I really feel this is right for me. I'm not looking to retire – as long as I am fit and able, this is what I am looking to do. I don't know what the future holds – it's in the hands of the Lord."



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