

Supporting people with dementia

Dementia is a disease of the brain that can result in a range of difficulties, including communication, safe eating, drinking and swallowing (dysphagia).

Speech and language therapists support people with dementia and those caring for them by assessing their needs and delivering direct interventions to support communication, safe eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties. They also support other professionals to recognise dementia-related symptoms and to recognise and support each person as an individual.

Muriel's story

Muriel's GP referred her to speech and language therapy. She had been experiencing word-finding difficulties and problems with her memory which made daily activities difficult. Following a language assessment and further medical tests, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Working with a psychologist, a speech and language therapist helped Muriel and her husband to improve their understanding of Muriel's condition and design strategies in response to it. This provided Muriel with an opportunity to discuss her communication difficulties, and offered her family tailored advice on ways to help improve Muriel's communication environment – for example, identifying memory aids that they could use at home.

Muriel feels that therapy has helped her manage her communication difficulties and give her more confidence in social situations. "I feel more like myself again. Before therapy I couldn't even find the words that I wanted to say. It hasn't been easy, but Kate [Muriel's therapist] has been with me every step of the way."



The size of the problem

► There are approximately **850,000** people with dementia in the UK:

- **720,000** people with dementia in England
- **88,000** in Scotland
- **45,000** in Wales
- **19,000** in Northern Ireland¹

This figure is predicted to rise to more than one million by 2021.²

► Currently, dementia costs the NHS, local authorities and families **£26.3 billion** a year.³ By 2026, this sum will grow to **£34.8 billion**.⁴

► Dementia affects men and women of all ages, ethnicities and social groups:

- There are more than **40,000** younger people with dementia in the UK.⁵
- One in three people older than 65 will develop dementia and two-thirds of people with dementia are women.⁶

► People with a learning disability are at greater risk of developing dementia at a younger age.⁷





REMEMBER SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Too few people understand the role that speech and language therapists have in helping individuals with dementia with communication, eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties, and the support they can provide to those caring for people living with dementia.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is calling on GPs, commissioners, budget holders and care providers to:

- ✦ Recognise the communication and eating, drinking and swallowing needs of people with dementia
- ✦ Ensure people with dementia have access to the speech and language therapy services they need in hospitals, care homes and in their own homes
- ✦ Set the highest standards for the education and training of health professionals, residential and home care staff to understand the communication needs experienced by people with dementia and those caring for people living with dementia, and to ensure they have the professional speech and language therapy support they need
- ✦ Provide education, support and training for health professionals, care home and agency staff to identify the early signs of eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties, and meet the nutritional needs of people with dementia

How speech and language therapy can help

Speech and language therapists have the specialist knowledge and skills to diagnose, directly assess and support problems in relation to communication, safe eating, drinking and swallowing. They:

- ✦ Work with individuals and those caring for people living with dementia throughout the course of dementia to identify communication needs
- ✦ Are able to work with those caring for people living with dementia and people with dementia to help maintain their interpersonal relationships
- ✦ Are uniquely qualified to assess an individual's ability to understand and to communicate that understanding to optimise a person's choice, degree of control and capacity to consent to treatment and care
- ✦ Play an important role in the assessment and management of eating, drinking and swallowing problems to prevent malnutrition and dehydration, and reduce the risk of repeated chest infections, pneumonia and choking



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- 1 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Clinical webpage on dementia (2015) www.rcslt.org/clinical_resources/dementia/prevalence_and_incidence_of_dementia
- 2 Alzheimer's Society (2014) Alzheimer's Infographic: www.alzheimers.org.uk/infographic
- 3 Alzheimer's Society (2014) Dementia UK: Update www.alzheimers.org.uk/dementiauk
- 4 McCrone P, et al. *Paying the Price*. King's Fund 2008 cited by Alzheimer's Society (2013) Dementia: What every commissioner needs to know.
- 5 Alzheimer's Society (2015) Dementia statistics: www.alzheimers.org.uk/statistics
- 6 Alzheimer's Society (2013) Dementia 2013: The hidden voice of loneliness: www.alzheimers.org.uk/infographic
- 7 Alzheimer's Society (2011) Learning disabilities and dementia factsheet.

► For more information email: info@rcslt.org or visit: www.rcslt.org/clinical_resources/dementia/overview