Giving Voice for People with Dementia

Professional body for speech and language therapy launches new ‘Dementia: Let’s Talk’ Campaign

DUP MLA Paula Bradley today (13th November 2014) joined health and community campaigners to launch the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists’ (RCSLT) dementia campaign in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings.

- Despite **19,000 diagnosed** dementia patients there is only one speech and language therapist dementia specialist – and she only works **part time**!
- With an ever-ageing population that 19,000 figure is set to rise to **60,000 diagnosed with dementia by 2051**
- **Sixty-eight percent** of those with dementia in homes for the aged have dysphagia – difficulties eating, drinking and swallowing

The RCSLT dementia campaign aims to raise awareness of the communication and eating, drinking and swallowing needs of people with dementia.

At present there are 19,000 people in Northern Ireland diagnosed with dementia and figures released by the Department for Health (DHSSPSNI) forecast that with continued ageing of the Northern Ireland population, the number of people diagnosed with dementia could rise to over 23,000 by 2017 and in excess of 60,000 by 2051.

RCSLT recognises that the challenges to health and social care services are immense and that speech and language therapists can play a vital role in not only the care of people with dementia but also reducing the number of hospital admissions through communications and eating, drinking and swallowing interventions.

Communication problems are particularly challenging in the later stages of dementia. This is one of the most distressing experiences of dementia for family carers. Speech and language therapists can work with individuals and family carers to identify communication difficulties and needs, helping them to maintain their interpersonal relationships.

Speech and language therapists can also assess an individual’s ability to understand and to communicate. Such a small intervention means that the patient has an improved choice, degree of control and ability to consent to treatment and care.

Speaking at the launch Paula Bradley MLA said:
“Dementia care is an opportunity for us as a society to provide dignity and support to some of our most vulnerable citizens. With greater levels of success in healthcare, more people are living longer. Families, carers and healthcare staff provide a great service for those diagnosed with dementia but it is vital that they are given the help and support needed to help them communicate and eat, drink and swallow.”

Alison McCullough MBE, RCSLT country policy officer spoke at the launch to say:
“Dementia is one of the biggest health challenges facing the world today and the RCSLT has made it our top priority from 2014 onwards. Too few people understand the role speech and language therapists have in helping individuals with communication, eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties, and the support they can provide to carers.

“We aim to raise awareness of our role in dementia care. Our task is to demonstrate to fellow health professionals, politicians and – most importantly – decision makers that we have a vital place
in supporting the care of people with dementia, so that our services are properly funded and used appropriately.”

Dementia Care Speech and Language Therapy Specialist Ruth Sedgewick from the Belfast Trust said: "People with dementia who find themselves requiring full time care, are already at a disadvantage as they have no voice, and are therefore not included in decisions about their life and care. I believe speech and Language therapists have a significant role to play in advocating and helping these people to find their voice. One of the reasons people with dementia have poorer outcomes is because healthcare staff are not trained with the appropriate communication skills required to break down barriers.

“Staff must be the communication facilitators, taking extra time to listen, interpret behaviours, and use strategies to ensure messages from both sides are easily understood. Speech and language therapists are very well placed to provide this communication education to staff and to provide individual communication assessments. We cannot stand for poor outcomes and poor standards of care simply because of this diagnosis.”

For more information on this UK-wide campaign visit: http://givingvoiceuk.org/dementia/

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About RCSLT
The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) launched the Giving Voice for People with Dementia campaign to improve the quality of care received by people with dementia and their carers. People with dementia and their carers have a range of needs in communication and safe eating and drinking which should be met by individuals with the appropriate clinical expertise or those who have been trained by people with that expertise.

NISRA Statistics
As the population survives into older age then deaths due to dementia (1,400 deaths last year) and cancer will become more numerous. http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp23.htm

Aging Population:
- Over the next 50 years our population of over 65’s will more than double from 244,000 to 493,000
- Between 2002 and 2012 Northern Ireland experienced a rise in the older population. The number of people aged 60-84 rose by 20%, while those aged 85+ rose by 38%
- The older population is projected to continue to rise; with the proportion of the population aged 60+ rising from one in five in 2011 to one in three in 2051
- Latest figures show that life expectancy has increased between 2006-2008 and 2009-2011; for males from 76.4 years to 77.5 years, and for females from 81.3 years to 82.0 years
- The number and proportion of older people in the population is steadily and consistently increasing. Between 2012 and 2013, the number adults aged 65 and over increased by 2.3% to 279,100. In the decade between 2003 and 2013, the population of this age group increased by 21.7%
• Between 2012 and 2013, the very elderly (defined here as those in the population aged 85 and over) population increased by 1.8% to 33,300. In the longer term, between 2003 and 2013, the population of this age group increased by 39.9% - more than five times greater than the overall population growth rate over the same period (7.3%)

• The number of adults aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 12.1%, from 279,100 to 312,900, between 2013 and 2018, and by 63.3% (to 455,700) between 2013 and 2033

• Between 2013 and 2018, the very elderly population is projected to increase by 22.2%, from 33,300 to 40,700, and more than double between 2013 and 2033 to 79,200

• In contrast to the growth in the older age groups, the number of children is projected to slowly increase until 2022, before decreasing thereafter. From 2027 onwards it is projected that there will be more persons aged 65 and over in the population than children

• In 1973 there were 81.7 dependents for every 100 persons of working age, comprising 56.9 children and 24.8 pensioners. By 2013, this dependency ratio had decreased to 60.9 (33.6 children and 27.3 pensioners). By 2033 this ratio is expected to increase again to 64.9 dependents per 100 persons of working age (31.2 children and 33.7 pensioners)