



RCSLT call for action on Dementia

“Everyone who needs it has access to quality speech, language and therapy services in hospitals, care homes and in their own homes”.

Improve the quality of life of people living with dementia and build on the success of the National Dementia Strategy.

Scotland needs this because –

- Around **86,000** people in Scotland are currently living with dementia. This number is set to **double** within the next 25 years.
- **Eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties (dysphagia)** are a challenge for most people living with dementia. **Sixty-eight per cent** of older people with dementia living in care homes have dysphagia.
- **Communication** problems occur in **ALL** forms of dementia for 100% of people with dementia, from early to later stages and become more challenging as the illness progresses.
- **Speech and language therapists (SLTs) enable people to maintain ability to eat, drink and swallow without choking and to communicate with their loved ones as well as they can for as long as possible.**
- **Scotland's National Dementia Strategy 2013-2016 spells out the importance of speech and language therapy (and other allied health professions) – to people living with dementia and their families from diagnosis onwards.**

Benefits of delivering on commitment –

- **Support and Protection of Vulnerable Adults:** Evidence shows people with communication difficulties are at greater risk of abuse than other people. SLTs help keep vulnerable adults with communication support needs safeguarded by enabling them to understand and access protection services.
- **Protect Human Rights:** Ability to understand information and express yourself is fundamental to enjoyment of human rights. SLTs enable a human rights-based approach to services by enabling people living with dementia to access information and express themselves as best they can all the way through to end of life care.
- **Provide dignity and respect:** SLTs have a key role in ensuring the person with dementia has the best opportunity to communicate their wishes and needs to, and have them understood by health professionals and family members.

- **Meet the Objectives of National Dementia Strategy:** SLTs contribute significantly to the National Dementia Strategy -enabling community connections, supporting individuals, families and care staff and promoting general health.
- **Deliver statutory health and wellbeing outcomes set out in the Public Services (Joint Working) Act 2014:** SLT services help people to look after their health and wellbeing and live in good health for longer; to live independently at home or in a homely setting; have positive experiences of health and social care services; maintain a quality of life; support carers; support colleagues to continuously improve the care and treatment they provide and save services time and money by preventing or reducing incidence of chest infections, anxiety and depression.

Problem with situation in Scotland now:

- **Service provision: Access to SLT as part of dementia care pathways is inconsistent and incomplete. Few adult SLT services have a dedicated dementia development capacity despite growing demand.**
- **Workforce planning does not take a multi-disciplinary approach so people in the care pathway meet road blocks as they wait for SLT services.**
- **Investment:** Evidence gathered for the Scottish Parliament's Health Committee in 2014 found **reductions in funding for SLT services** including adult services.

Paying for the commitment:

- **SLT services are cost-effective**, reducing hospitalisation due to chest infections and decreasing levels of residential care by reducing care-dependency.
- Speech and language therapy rapid response dysphagia service in **Sandwell Community Healthcare Services** produced a **47%** fall in the number of ward referrals for eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties among those with dementia.
- The **National Audit Office** found that it was possible to save **£6 million per annum** in an acute setting through more effective provision of community dementia services and a partnership response to service delivery.

Useful questions to ask candidates:

- How will your party ensure that the health and social care services, required to support the care of people with dementia, include speech and language therapy?
- How can SLT services manage increasing demands, for example from rising numbers of people diagnosed with dementia, if adult SLT service provision is being cut?
- Given input from speech and language therapists can help reduce hospital admission and improve care outcomes for people with dementia, why do you think it is not being provided for all patients with dementia who need it? What will your party offer to do about this?

For further information, please contact:

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