

Dementia Rise Prompts 'Disaster' Warning

By Craig Christie, The Northern Scot

A Social disaster of mammoth proportions is looming in Moray because of a predicted increase in dementia cases, it has been claimed.

A report has claimed that the number of people suffering from the degenerative disease could almost double over the next few years.

Recent figures show that 3,000 people in Moray currently suffer from dementia, but projections suggest that this number could rise as high as 5,500 by the year 2014, representing an increase of 83%.

Moray's mental health integrated manager Mike Perera said that this was the worst-case scenario for Moray, saying, "That is the potential scale of this terrible disease".

Councillor Joe Mackay (Buckie) called the figures "amazingly alarming" when they were revealed at a meeting of the health and social care services committee on Wednesday.

"This disease only appears to get progressively worse," he said. "I believe we have a very serious future problem staring us in the face."

He said that the situation was a potential catastrophe and that, without proper funding, the authority would be unable to tackle it.

"As a nation, we are heading for a social disaster of mammoth proportions with very serious economic consequences."

Councillors were told that the estimated average cost of treating a person suffering from dementia is £25,472, which represents a £75 million impact on the local economy.

The go-ahead was given to form a strategy group to devise a blueprint supporting the development of dementia care over the next 20 years.

"In order to cope effectively with the projected increase in the numbers of people with dementia and the associated cost, it is essential that Moray has a forward-looking strategy for dementia," Mr Perera said.

He estimated that around 330 people in Moray each year were diagnosed with the disease, which is a major cause of disability in the over-60 age group. These

people needed self-management training and support to help them cope with dementia, he added.

Mr Perera emphasised the importance of people making lifestyle changes now to reduce the risk of dementia later in life, saying they have to "look after the brain as well as the heart".

In 2007, care homes in Moray had 300 residents with dementia, although Mr Perera felt that this could have been an underestimate. Moray currently has 596 care home places across 17 facilities, and 108 community hospital beds. The homes were supported by just one nurse, Mr Perera said, and part of the strategy would be to train managers and care staff to recognise the early signs of dementia and be able to report these to health professionals.

"Many people in care homes may have dementia but not a diagnosis," he said.

Councillor Mackay said it was a disease which had a slow effect, with many of the symptoms being untraceable. "There are people walking about today with the first signs of dementia who don't know it yet."

Head of community care, Sally Chisholm, added: "There is a fine line between somebody being confused for other reasons and automatically being diagnosed with dementia."

Among the aims of the strategy would be to: Increase provision of specialist dementia day care facilities; Allow home care workers more time to support people with dementia; Provide more respite options for carers and patients; Improve dementia training for community care staff.

The council has already supported a drop-in centre at Clydeville in Buckie, with plans to introduce similar facilities in Forres and Keith.

Councillor Mackay added his concerns over the threat of closure to the Muirton ward at Seafield Hospital in Buckie, which opened in 1991 and specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of dementia patients.

He praised staff at Muirton, calling it a "first-class facility" which needed to be retained for the sake of the Buckie area.

Councillor Douglas Ross supported his colleague, saying there had been a strong campaign in the community to save the Muirton ward, and called for a mental health facility to be retained in Buckie.

Director of community services, Sandy Riddell, stressed that the strategy would

cover a wide range of services and would not adopt a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and would build on the good work already being done.

Courtesy: <http://www.globalaging.org/health/world/2008/rise.htm>