

The Global Impact of Dementia

What is dementia?

Dementia is a progressive, degenerative brain syndrome that affects memory, thinking, behaviour and emotion. Dementia knows no social, economic, ethnic or geographical boundaries and affects people throughout the world. As dementia progresses individuals affected need care with all aspects of daily life, worldwide families mostly provide this care.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and accounts for 50-60% of all cases and is caused by abnormal brain tissue changes.

Who does it affect?

International studies make it clear that dementia occurs in every country of the world. Dementia affects 1 in 20 people over the age of 65 and 1 in 5 over the age of 80. Worldwide there are an estimated 24 million people with dementia. By 2040 the number will have risen to 81 million.

Where do people with dementia live?

For at least 15 years, the majority of people with dementia worldwide have been living in developing regions of the world. They account already for 60% of all cases; by 2040 this proportion will have risen to 71%.

Care arrangements

Research has shown that most people with dementia live in their own homes and are cared for by a female caregiver usually a spouse or daughter and that caring is associated with substantial psychological and financial strain. (Int J Geriatric Psychiatry 2004 19 170-177). In contrast to developed countries, more than a quarter of people with dementia in developing countries live in a multigenerational household with their children and grandchildren.

Cost of care

Caregivers have to cut back on paid work or stop work altogether, informal care is often supplemented by formal paid care and people with dementia are relatively heavy consumers of health services. It is estimated in the United States that direct and indirect annual costs of caring for people with dementia is at least \$100 billion. *

What is needed?

1. Recognition of the early symptoms of dementia :Dementia is surrounded by stigma and myth. Many people associate the early symptoms of dementia as a normal consequence of ageing and therefore do not come forward for the help and support that is available. Recognising the symptoms of dementia is the first step towards receiving a diagnosis. A diagnosis can help to reduce the anxiety of people with dementia and their family, allow a greater chance to benefit from existing treatments, access resources and information and provide more time to plan for the future.

Ten early symptoms of dementia:

- Memory loss
- Difficulty in performing everyday tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time and place
- Poor or decreased judgment
- Problems with keeping track of things
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood or behaviour
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

2. Cost effective interventions

These are needed worldwide to provide support for people with dementia and their families to maintain and improve quality of life. Research has shown that there are ways to reduce the stresses of caring:

Information and education empowers people to understand what is happening to them and their loved one and how to cope better.

Support groups provide an opportunity to share experiences and feelings.

Professional counselling has been shown to be effective in improving morale and decreasing feelings of stress.

A break from caring is essential, respite can be achieved informally by arranging for the person with dementia to stay with relatives or friends or formally through services such as day care and short stays in residential units.

Practical help in the home, financial support and a key person to turn to are also useful.

3. Policy provision

Integrated policy and services across health and social sectors are essential. Reliable and accurate data about the prevalence and impact of dementia in communities is required to inform better decision-making and policy formation to enable appropriate and accessible service development.

Source: <http://www.alz.co.uk/media/dementia.html>