

Cross Party Group on Dementia

27/10/2015

Meeting Start Time: 13:00

Present: Katla Helgason (National Dementia Carers Action Network), Amy Dalrymple (Alzheimer Scotland), Professor John Starr (Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Research Centre), Mary Hattie (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland), Graeme Morrison (The Health and Social Care Alliance), Shirley Law (Dementia Services Development Centre), Dr Seamus McNulty (RC Psych/Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry), Lynne Stevenson (Nutricia), Lucy Richards (StudioLR), Roderick Campbell MSP, Nanette Milne MSP, Mary Fee MSP, Paul Gillen (in-house secretariat)

Apologies: Sue Northrup, Anna Buchanan (Life Changes Trust), Dr Gary Stevenson (Royal College of Psychiatrists), Scottish Care, Susanne Cameron-Nielsen (Royal Pharmaceutical Society), Richard Simpson MSP, Andrew Senew (Home Instead Senior Care), Mary Scanlon MSP.

Roderick Campbell MSP (RC) welcomed attendees, and introduced Professor John Starr, who was to give a presentation on dementia research.

Presentation from Professor John Starr

John Starr (JS) began by referring to Michel Foucault and the “Order for Things”, which is particularly interesting to those who study cognition. He then referred to the memory clinics that he has participated in, and thought back to the many faces that he has seen in those clinics. JS felt that when people get dementia, they “wash away before they die”. He also felt that there was a sadness that even 20 years on, things have not changed very much, in terms of what we know about dementia.

JS felt that the issues of cause and care have not really been addressed. Something needs to be done about that, according to JS, and he explained that this was his motivation for conducting dementia research. JS made it clear that another important aspect to dementia research projects is to train researchers, so that they can then continue to do research, even after a project may have finished.

JS then went on to discuss collaboration in dementia research. He stated that it is important to have collaborations, and dementia research is international, reaching as far as Chile and New Zealand.

Turning to research in the UK, JS went onto discuss Dementia Platform UK. Dementia Platform UK, which is co-ordinated in Edinburgh, has been focusing on early treatments, and new investments have been made, in that regard. There have been moves to ramp up research, with just over £30,000,000 in funding. Such funding includes stem cell investment, and detection equipment. 5 of the 14 people who have led Dementia Platform UK are based in Scotland, and JS noted, therefore, that Scotland is “holding its own”.

JS then went onto discuss a project where people were fitted with a device that could register cognitive reaction to being “out and about”. He pointed out that a healthy life was important, and that going “out and about” was part of that. JS noted that dementia sufferers require clear signs when out in public, and work with architects is on-going, to work out what a pleasant and ambient place should look like.

JS also pointed out that people with dementia have as much to bring to dementia research as the researchers. We can’t stop dementia, he said, but we can prevent it, by being healthy, including stopping smoking and eating healthily.

JS then turned to discuss unpublished research from Italy and Sweden. Because the work he referred to is not yet published, that section of the presentation cannot be included in this official minute.

Turning to Scotland, JS noted that Scotland has national cohorts. Those with a low IQ have a higher risk of dementia. At age 11, location in Scotland had no bearing on how likely someone was to get dementia. However, by mid to late age, a North South pattern develops, with those in the North more at risk. JS noted that rurality has nothing to do with this.

JS also discussed some challenging findings. In Glasgow, for example, despite a poorer health record than in other places in Scotland, there was no change in the risk of getting dementia. Findings for Scotland are consistent with findings in other countries around the World.

JS then turned to the other research that was being conducted. He referred to work on early diagnosis, MR Elastography, and short term visual memory binding. He also referred to the Brain tissue bank.

A Question and answer session took place after the presentation.

The meeting was then brought to a close, and finished at approximately 14.00.