

Dementia Carer Support Group

Dementia is a life changing illness that affects both the person with dementia and those who love and care for them.

The greatest risk factor for dementia is the ageing process. At age 65 years one can expect approximately 5% of all persons to be diagnosed with dementia. At the age of 90 years old a third of folk (statistically) will be diagnosed with dementia. Although age is the greatest contributing factor, it is heartening to know that the majority of people will not develop the illness (at age 90 years two thirds of people will not develop dementia).

Over the age of 30 years we can all expect to have a degree Age Related Cognitive Impairment. In every day activity we can develop problems with our short term memory e.g. 'what have I come to do upstairs phenomenon'. It does not follow that this condition will develop into a dementia.

Dementia is diagnosed in a Memory Clinic by a multi-disciplinary team including a Consultant Psychiatrist, Clinical Psychologist, Nurse Practitioners and an Occupational Therapist. There are more than a hundred subtypes of dementia; the most common subtype is Dementia of the Alzheimer Type. Other types of dementia include – Vascular Dementia, Dementia of Lewy Bodies, and Dementia in Parkinson's disease.

Medication is available to slow down the advance of Dementia of the Alzheimer Type. Unfortunately there is no medication available to cure dementia or even to permanently halt its advance.

Despite the lack of any curative medication it is important to offer an early diagnosis. This allows the person with dementia and their loved ones/carers to make arrangements that could have a bearing on their future. They might wish to reconsider the person's ability to continue driving a car, a Lasting Power of Attorney, Advance Decision to Refuse Treatment, making or redrafting a Will, consider activities to stimulate the brain and to arrange, if necessary a Social Services Needs Assessment and Carer's Assessment.

The dementia illness affects so many people known to the person with dementia (spouse, adult children, relatives, acquaintances and friends to mention but a few). The aim of the Dementia Carer Support Group is to provide 'carers' with support in their relationships with the person with dementia. It is an opportunity to ask questions of Dr Johan Schoeman (NHS Consultant in Older Peoples Mental Health) or other health professionals that attend the Group. It is also an opportunity to network with other 'carers' who face the same issues caring for a person with dementia.

The Dementia Support Group is held once a month (the third Friday of the month) at the Church Hall, Priory St Peter Church in Dunstable. The meeting is free of charge. It is as easy as arriving at 1.30pm, enjoying a refreshment, listening to the presentation and networking with professionals and others who understand what it is like to be a carer and give support the person with dementia.

Should you have further questions about the Dementia Carer Support Group, please contact Dr Schoeman on 01582 707591 or email him on johan.schoeman@sept.nhs.uk