

In a significant move concerning the diagnosis of dementia, NHS England announced in October that GPs would be paid £55 for every patient they diagnose. Is this an effective scheme to ensure that patients living with dementia are properly diagnosed or is it "a

Quality as well as quantity for dementia diagnosis and care



distortion of good medical practice"?

The announcement, by NHS England's Chief Executive Simon Stevens, is part of a six-month £5m scheme aimed at diagnosing two thirds of people with dementia by 2015 and to increase the number of sufferers who receive treatment for the condition.

Dementia is a very serious illness, and it has recently been revealed by the Office of National Statistics as the most common cause of death for women in England and Wales, and the third largest cause of death for men. Gavin Terry, Policy Manager at the Alzheimer's Society said, "Dementia is one of the biggest health and social care challenges the UK faces" and it is estimated that there will

be 1 million people living with dementia in the UK by 2025.

So arguably, NHS England's scheme which aims to ensure that people with dementia are diagnosed is no bad thing. However, since NHS England's announcement, a number of concerns have been raised about the necessity or effectiveness of such a scheme from various interested parties.

Notably, Katherine Murphy, Chief Executive of the Patients Association pointed out, "Good GPs would be diagnosing dementia patients already" and this scheme would instead be "rewarding poor GPs" in "a distortion of good medical practice". In the significant position of responsibility that GPs have by the very nature of their role, they should be diagnosing a patient appropriately regardless of a financial incentive.

One could argue that it raises the question about whether a GP would be acting in their own interest, or the patients' interest, if they are incentivised to diagnose an illness.

Additionally, Dementia UK raised an important point when it stated that "these plans suggest that we're able to give people

better quality of life if diagnosed much earlier, but that would depend solely on our ability to deliver high quality post-diagnostic support." Dementia is an incurable illness, one that does not just affect the individual living with it, but also their loved ones. Diagnosis of the disease is just one step in a long and emotional journey. The care that people living with dementia receive is vital to their comfort and the way that they and their loved ones cope with the illness. It is therefore vitally important that the government and NHS England pay very close attention to the way dementia care is provided across the country, to ensure that everyone who needs support gets what they need.

The sector will watch with intrigue to see the effects of NHS England's proposals and whether the target of diagnosing two thirds of dementia sufferers by next year is met. Throughout all of this though, it must be remembered that it is not just the quantity of people who are diagnosed that matters; the quality of the care they receive is equally important.

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