

Dementia

Summary

- Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a set of symptoms associated with progressive decline of the brain, including memory loss, difficulties with language, problem-solving, perception and understanding.
- There are over 100 types of dementia, and an estimated 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK, with their carers doubling or even trebling the number affected.
- The four most common types of dementia are;
 - Alzheimer's disease: around two thirds of the total number of dementia cases, resulting usually in a progressive decline over a number of years.
 - Vascular dementia: when blood flow to the brain becomes restricted as the result of a stroke or from damage to the blood vessels in the brain.
 - Dementia with Lewy bodies: affecting around 15% of people with dementia, with similar symptoms to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.
 - Front temporal dementia: less common, usually in people under 65, causing symptoms such as changes to personality, behaviour, and language difficulties.
- In Royal Greenwich, there are an estimated 1,887 people living with dementia. 1,127 have a formal diagnosis (60%) higher than the London average of 59% and 12th out of 32 London boroughs for dementia diagnoses (January 2015).
- It is possible to develop dementia early in life; but the chances increase with age; one in 50 people aged 65 - 70 will have dementia.
- A healthy lifestyle can help lower the risk of developing dementia; a healthy diet, physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, and not drinking too much alcohol.
- Early diagnosis is beneficial for people to live well with dementia, allowing people to contribute to planning their future care, and access the right treatment.
- Planned improvements include continuing to improve dementia diagnosis in Greenwich, and making the borough a dementia-friendly place to live.

Dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a set of symptoms associated with the progressive decline of the brain. These symptoms include; memory loss, difficulties with language, problem-solving, perception and understanding. There are over 100 types of dementia and it is estimated that there are 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK, with their carers doubling or even trebling this number of people whose lives are directly affected by dementia. Taking into account the impact on family and friends, the number of people affected increases this number further. Each person with dementia is unique and will experience dementia differently. The progression of dementia can vary with the individual and people may live with it for 8-10 years after the first symptoms.^{1, 2, 3}

The four most common types of dementia are;

- Alzheimer's disease: accounting for around two thirds of the total number of dementia cases, Alzheimer's disease is the most common type dementia and is caused by the formation of abnormal proteins that build up in the brain, interfering with how the brain cells work and communicate with each other. Alzheimer's disease is usually a progressive decline over a number of years.^{1, 3}
- Vascular dementia: this type of dementia is the second most common and occurs when blood flow to the brain becomes restricted. This can be the result of a stroke or from damage to the blood vessels in the brain.^{1, 3}
- Dementia with Lewy bodies: affecting around 15% of people with dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies shares symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. Lewy bodies are tiny deposits of protein in nerve cells linked to a loss of connections between nerve cells.^{1, 2, 3}
- Front temporal dementia: this type of dementia is less common and affects the frontal and temporal lobes in the brain. Unlike other types of dementia, front temporal dementia usually develops in people who are under 65 and causes symptoms such as changes to personality, behaviour, and difficulties with language.^{1, 2, 3}

In Royal Greenwich, there are an estimated 1,887 people living with dementia, of these, 1,127 have received a formal diagnosis and are on the Royal Borough of Greenwich dementia register. This gives the borough a diagnosis rate of 60%, which is higher than the London average of 59% and ranks us 12th out of 32 London boroughs for dementia diagnoses (January 2015). In addition to this, Royal Greenwich is performing better than the national diagnosis rate which is currently 57%, meaning that our dementia gap of 40% (per cent of patients yet to be diagnosed) is also lower than the London dementia gap and national dementia gap which are 41% and 43% respectively. The new dementia diagnosis target for Greenwich at 67% to be reached in March 2015 was exceeded slightly with 69% diagnosis achieved. Of the patients living with dementia in the borough, 212 (11%) are living in a care home, while 1,675 (89%) are being cared for in the community.⁴ Figure 1, overleaf, shows how Royal Greenwich has improved the diagnosis rates over time since 2009 and how the dementia gap has been reduced.

Source: Greenwich JSNA 2013/14 "Closing the Gap." Public Health & Well-Being, Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Risk factors

It is possible to develop dementia early in life; however the chances of developing dementia increase with age. One in 14 people over the age of 65 will go on to develop dementia at some point, while one in 50 people between the ages of 65 and 70 will have dementia. This figure increases to one in five people over the age of 80. Dementia is more common in women, and minority ethnic groups are slightly more likely to develop young onset dementia and vascular dementia.^{1,3}

Figure 1 – Dementia Diagnosis Rate over Time in Greenwich⁴

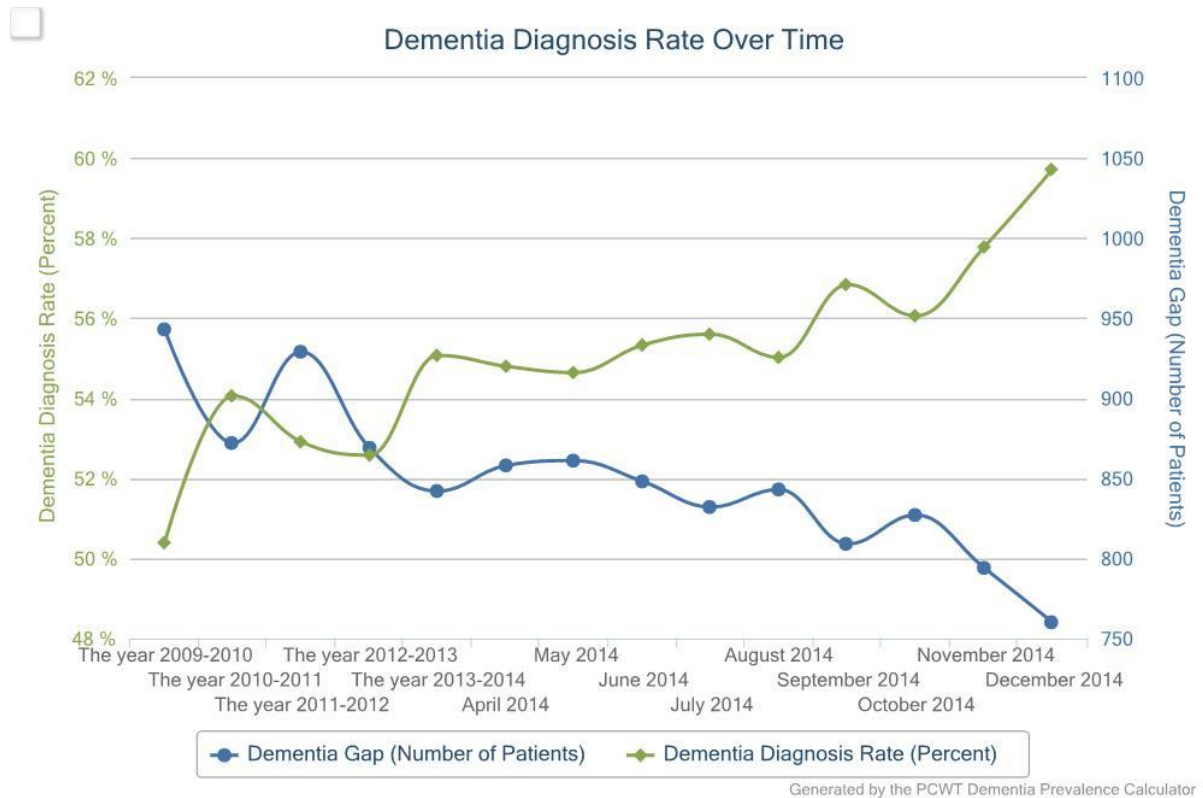
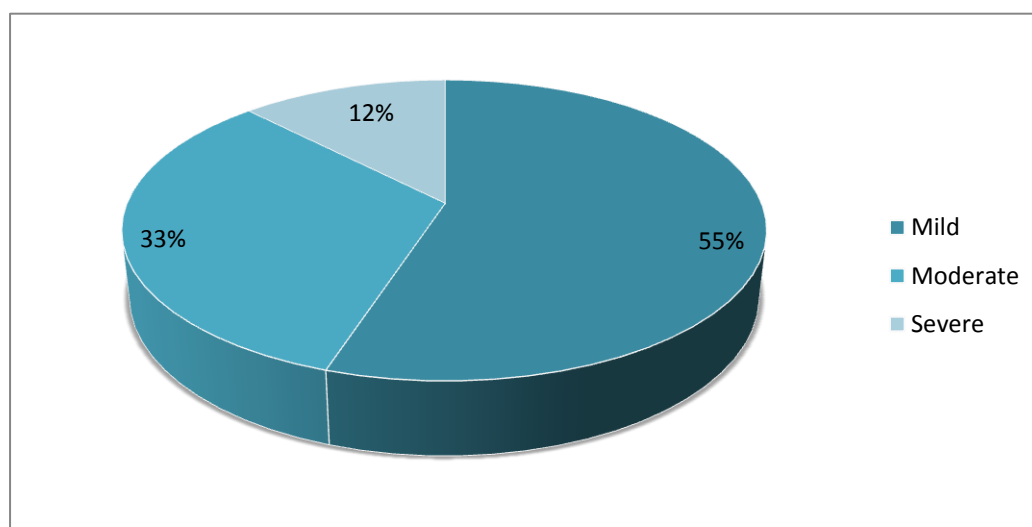


Figure 2 – Breakdown of Dementia Severity in Royal Greenwich⁴



Source: Greenwich JSNA 2013/14 “Closing the Gap.” Public Health & Well-Being, Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Prevention

There is evidence to suggest that a healthy lifestyle can help to lower your risk of developing dementia. A healthy lifestyle includes; eating a healthy diet, participating in physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, and not drinking too much alcohol.^{1,3}

Early identification

Early diagnosis is beneficial for people to live well with dementia. Having an early diagnosis allows people with dementia to contribute to planning their future care, access to the right treatment, and allows carers to become informed before problems arise. Furthermore, it allows preventative strategies to be utilised such as telecare and counselling, allows people to be supported appropriately and provided with suitable information which they can assess when they need it, this can in turn help avoid unplanned admissions to the emergency services.

In Royal Greenwich, there is a 40% diagnosis gap; meaning that an estimated 755 patients who have dementia in the borough do not have a diagnosis.⁴ Royal Borough of Greenwich has been working hard to improve rates of diagnosis for people with dementia by working with a number of healthcare professionals to increase awareness. In addition to this, there are a number of schemes running in Royal Greenwich to improve diagnosis and support in dementia care, for example; a review and improvement to the Hospital Pathway, Greenwich Advanced Dementia Service and the planned development of a Local Dementia Action Alliance. Furthermore, nationally, 'Dementia Friends' is helping to reduce stigma for people with dementia, their friends, relatives, colleagues and those working in the health sector.⁵

Planned improvements

- Continue to improve dementia diagnosis in the borough – diagnosis rates now reach or exceed 67% and need to remain at or above this percentage
- Alongside this improved diagnosis rate, to also prioritise post diagnosis support going forward
- Continue to make Greenwich a dementia-friendly place to live
- Improve support services for carers of people with dementia to increase resilience
- Support people with dementia to remain in their own home
- Increase the range of accommodation choices for people with dementia, including extra care schemes
- Influence the design of accommodation to create environments which provide stimulation, enjoyment and dignified person-centred care
- Improve access to everyday activities and support for people with dementia and their carers to live a good life and focus on the things they enjoy, to keep active and reduce social isolation and loneliness

References

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