

18 January 2019

A rethink of dementia critical to ending abuse

Alzheimer's WA says the practice of using chemical (and physical restraints) on people living with dementia is so fundamentally flawed and dangerous that a major shift in the paradigm of the care and understanding of a person living with dementia is urgently needed.

Head of Dementia Practice Jason Burton said the call comes after recent disturbing reports of the treatment of people living with dementia in residential aged care facilities in the lead up to the Royal Commission into Aged Care.

"The failed thinking that the communication we see through the behaviour of a person with dementia is due to the damage in the brain rather than the person expressing ill-being has led us down a road of systemic medication abuse," Jason said.

"The drugs used to sedate people living with dementia are ineffective, dangerous and strip the remaining capacities a person has.

"Research shows us that more than 80 per cent of people prescribed these drugs get no clinical benefit at all and that the risk of death, stroke and falls is significantly magnified for people prescribed them.

"Much of the distress communicated from people with dementia is not to do with the dementia itself, but related to things such as unrecognised pain, boredom and loneliness, so providing a pharmaceutical response designed to block neurotransmitters is not addressing the issue on any level."

Mr Burton said care providers, the medical profession and government must embrace a new paradigm and deliver care models that enhance the wellbeing for a person living with dementia, and stop sedating people who are in distress.

"When you create an environment where the human rights of an individual are respected and wellbeing is paramount, it has a significant impact on the lived experience of dementia and the need to "manage behaviour", as it is often described, no longer becomes necessary," he said.

"Changing our thinking about dementia is paramount.

"Dementia alters the way a person experiences the world. Staff who are trained to understand this changed perception of the world and who then create a supportive environment that compensates for the disabilities and difficulties caused by the person's cognitive impairments are critical.

MEDIA STATEMENT

“The maintenance of each persons wellbeing is a fundamental part of this response.

“I am hopeful that this Royal Commission will be a watershed in the cultural framework, design and delivery of aged care services in Australia.

“I hope that it will create a new confidence and consistency in the delivery of compassionate care that truly values each individual.

“I also hope it will deliver a new and respectful attitude to ageing and our elders that Alzheimer’s WA have worked so hard, for so long to achieve.”

ENDS

Statistics

- There are currently 41,149 people living with dementia in Western Australia.
- This figure is predicted to increase dramatically to over 84,000 people in less than twenty years and almost 150,000 people by 2056¹.
- Dementia is the leading cause of death of women in Australia, and the second leading cause of death of all Australians². There is no cure.

Sources

¹ NATSEM calculations using Australian Bureau of Statistics population projections

² Australian Bureau of Statistics

– Ends –

Media contacts: Moira McKechnie, (08) 6271 1022 / 0433 567 224 /
moira.mckechnie@alzheimers.org.au

MEDIA STATEMENT

Notes to media:

Stories in the media about dementia may prompt concerns or cause distress for audiences and readers. When writing or talking about dementia, please encourage your audience/readers to call our Customer Support line on 1300 66 77 88, a free call, telephone information and support service.

What is appropriate language for talking about dementia and why we need it?

The words used to talk about dementia can have a significant impact on how people with dementia are viewed and treated in our community. In particular, please avoid the use of the word sufferer or suffering – the preferred language is a person/people living with dementia. Please read the [Dementia Language Guidelines](#) that have been developed by people living with dementia and carers.

About Alzheimer's WA

As the dementia experts Alzheimer's WA works with those living with dementia and the organisations that care and support them, to have the greatest beneficial impact on their dementia journey.

Our client services, advocacy work, training and consultancy programs are based on a philosophy of understanding the lived experience of dementia. We are guided by people living with dementia and our approach views dementia as a holistic experience for the person rather than just a biological illness. Call our Customer Support line on 1300 66 77 88 or visit www.alzheimerswa.org.au.