21 May 2014

As the UK marks dementia awareness week (18-24 May 2014), HEKSS is preparing to launch a world-leading initiative to change professional attitudes to dementia and other long-term conditions and enhance understanding and compassion.

Dementia is one of the greatest challenges we face:

- 800,000 people live with dementia in the UK. This is expected to rise to 1 million by 2021.
- Kent, Surrey and Sussex have the greatest proportion of older people in the country.
- 50,000 people are currently diagnosed with dementia in the region, but we also have one of the lowest rates of diagnosis. This figure is expected to rise to 75,000 by 2030.
- Nationally, the cost of treatment and care for dementia is estimated to be £23bn, and there are thought to be around 670,000 unpaid family carers.

?Time for Dementia? initiative

Through the HEKSS ?Time for Dementia? programme, medical, nursing and paramedic students will, as part of their curriculum, visit a person with dementia and their family at least four times a year for the duration of their course. Visits will take place in pairs and learning will be consolidated through individual reflection and group work. This will provide a unique longitudinal experience for students of what it is to be elderly and ill with a long term condition. Sube Banerjee, the project lead said:

It will build empathy and understanding of long term conditions and the role of health and social services in their care.

We believe it could support a profound change in professional attitudes to dementia, transforming care for patients and their families.

Victoria Hare, HEKSS Programme Manager for Dementia said:

The initiative is being delivered in partnership with Brighton and Sussex Medical School, the
University of Surrey and the Alzheimer’s Society. ‘We’re gearing up for a September intake of over 300 students as a pilot scheme, with the aim of rolling out the initiative to all undergraduate healthcare programmes in the region if it is successful.

Dementia skills development programme

The ‘Time for Dementia’ initiative is just one of many projects being co-ordinated as part of the HEKSS dementia skills development strategy. The strategy was set up to prioritise action on dementia and is led by a programme board chaired by Lisa Rodrigues, Chief Executive of Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Victoria said:

The programme was set up last year as one of five priorities for training and education that we identified with stakeholders across the region. But it has also been identified as an important national priority as well. We’re educating and training all levels of our workforce to improve diagnosis rates, treatment and care. This means we can increase the offer of cost-effective interventions to patients and their families, enabling them to live well and improving their quality of life.

The programme delivers on the Department of Health’s mandate to Health Education England to develop and deliver the skills required by NHS staff help people and their families live well with dementia.

Training and education

This year 64 GPs, practice and community nurses and allied health professionals across Kent, Surrey and Sussex are taking part in the HEKSS Dementia Fellowship programme [6] delivered by Brighton and Sussex Medical School to help them gain the knowledge and skills to develop better dementia care in their areas. An acute care fellowship for general hospital staff will start in November.

Victoria said:

We want to help professionals to break down the barriers between services to find and implement new ways of providing better more joined-up care for people with dementia and other long term conditions.

Support for families and carers is also an important part of care and treatment. Training for staff in memory clinics and other points of diagnosis will soon be available so that we can make sure the right support is available at the right time.

Other training priorities for 2014/15 include empowering care home staff to deliver better care for people with dementia and foundation level awareness for those staff who play a non-specialist role in a patient’s care, such as GP receptionists and hospital ward staff.


Links
[5] https://www.hee.nhs.uk/about