



## The role of the Alzheimer's Society in hospitals

Pernille Woods (Research Assistant), Ellen Hughes (Research Assistant), Professor George Tadros (Clinical Director)

### Introduction

The Alzheimer's Society is the leading support and research charity that provides information and advice on dementia for patients, families and carers (Alzheimer's Society, 2014). In collaboration with the Alzheimer's Society a new initiative to support patients with memory problems in a general hospital has been launched. Alzheimer's Society support workers hold two weekly drop-in sessions at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital to provide information and plan community follow-up visits.

The new initiative was implemented by the Rapid Assessment, Interface and Discharge (RAID) Psychiatric Liaison team in collaboration with the Elderly Care department, and the Alzheimer's Society. Since July 2013, support workers from the Alzheimer's Society have held weekly sessions in the hospital, to which any patients, carers, visitors or hospital staff can attend. Facilitating this first contact allows patients and their families who have concerns about memory decline, or who have received a diagnosis of dementia, to easily and quickly obtain accurate information and advice while they are in the hospital. If required, this can lead to a referral to the Alzheimer's Society to access their services and local support.

Leading the fight  
against dementia

**Alzheimer's  
Society**

### Methods

A service evaluation was conducted with semi-structured staff and carer interviews regarding their views on the service, and attendance data to the Alzheimer's Society sessions were recorded. Data was collected by a designated research assistant between August and December 2013.

### Results

Between August and December 2013, 196 individuals visited the Alzheimer's Society in Heartlands Hospital. Of these, 18 individuals received referrals to access community services. Six carers provided feedback. Carers recommended that a similar service should exist in other hospitals. Staff believed this service complements patients' care pathway, and can help to reduce carer burnout.

Attendance to Alzheimer's Society sessions at Heartlands hospital (August to December 2014)	
<b>Total number of individuals seen by the Alzheimer's Society</b>	<b>196</b>
Number of individuals seen at the stand	166
Number of individuals seen in the drop-in clinic	30
Number of referrals made to the Alzheimer's Society	18

### Staff: main themes

Benefits:

- Increasing levels of engagement and referrals to the Alzheimer's Society;
- Increasing levels of people accessing support;
- Seeing people face to face immediately.

**"...more likely to engage with a physical person they can see in the hospital there and then..."**  
(Staff Nurse, Heartlands Hospital)

Other feedback:

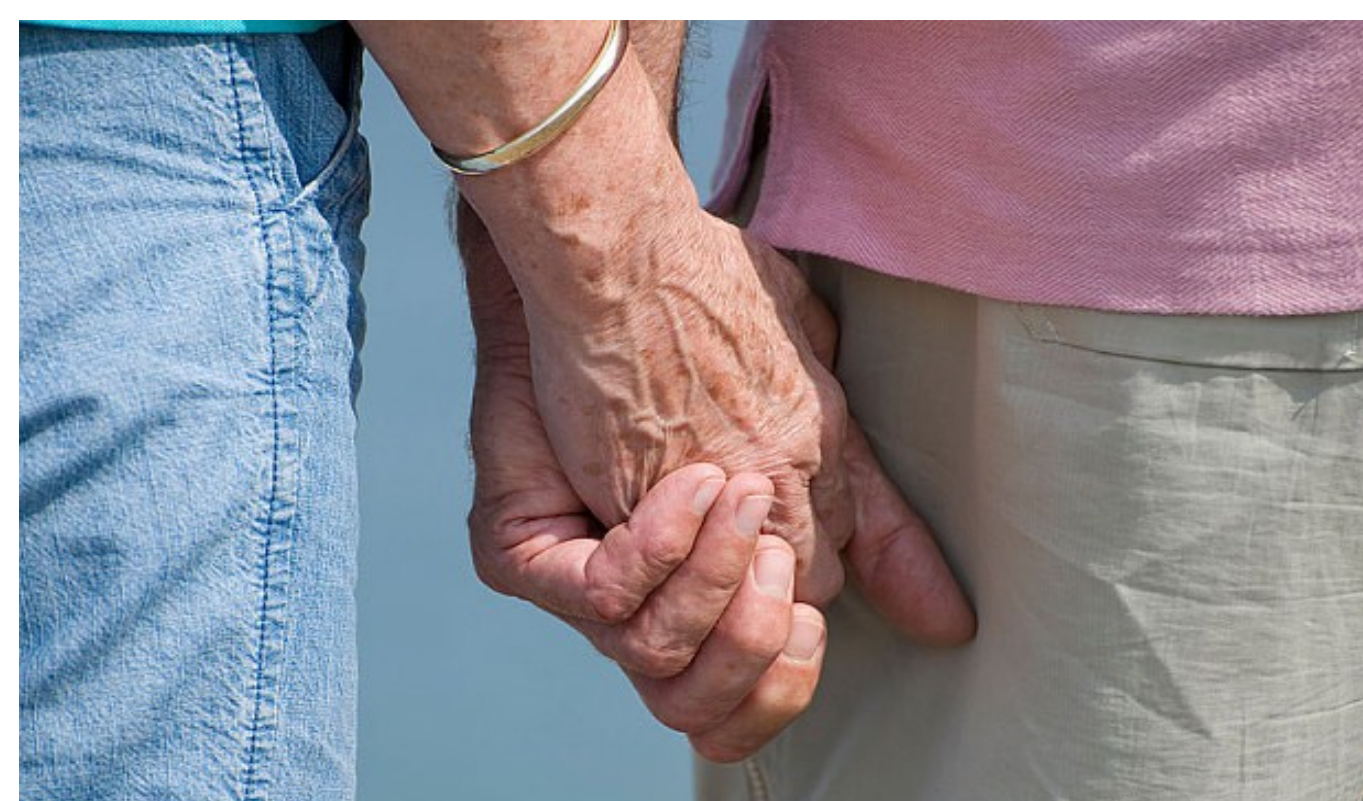
- Appropriate timing of advice and support;
- The service may have found a good balance having both informal stands and private drop in sessions. This will allow people to choose how and when they would like to engage with the service.

**"Lots of people get a diagnosis whilst in hospital, so it is a good time to give information to them and carers..."**  
(Staff Nurse, Heartlands Hospital)

### Carers: main themes

Benefits:

- Some carers just wanted to talk to someone who knew about caring for someone with dementia, and to 'put a name to the face' in case they decided to get a referral at a later time;
- Seeking information and help, **"knowing someone is there when you hit that brick wall"**;



- All six carers reported that they got what they had hoped for from the meeting.

Other feedback:

- None of the carers had yet been to any Alzheimer's Society support groups or dementia cafés, but two carers were aware of them and how to access these in the future;
- All six carers felt it would be helpful if Alzheimer's Society support workers were based in other hospitals for anyone to speak to;
- One carer stated that **"it was very helpful"**, while another commented that it had **"taken a load off their shoulders"**;
- All carers reported that they would recommend the Alzheimer's Society to others;



- Interestingly, one carer who had contacted the Alzheimer's Society in the past had not received the help and support they had hoped for. However, after meeting with the Alzheimer's Society at Heartlands they reported being in favour of this service, and hoped that the current level of support would continue.

### Conclusion

This service evaluation shows the positive effect that collaboration with third sector organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society can have on helping patients and carers feel supported when a diagnosis of dementia is made in an acute hospital.

The implications for practice are great when considering the encouraging comments from staff and carers who have used the service, particularly in regard to the recommendations for similar services in other general hospitals, where staff may also find it challenging to provide the sufficient level of information and support following a diagnosis of dementia.

### References

Alzheimer's Society (2014) *Alzheimer's Society: Who we are*. <http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents.php?categoryID=200126> (accessed 7 October 2014)