Reading Well, Books on Prescription for Dementia: Coming soon to a library near you!

Deirdre Bonner, Locum Consultant Psychiatrist, Community Mental Health Team, CNWL NHS Foundation Trust, St Charles Hospital, Exmoor Street, London W10 6DZ
deirdrebonner@nhs.net

Introduction
Reading Well Books on Prescription (RWBOP) for dementia will be available in public libraries from January 2015. The booklist of 25 titles includes professionally endorsed information and advice for people diagnosed with dementia, their carers, and people worried about symptoms or wanting to find out more about the condition. It provides cost-effective support for existing health services and an efficient way of delivering early intervention care in the community.

Public libraries and dementia friendly communities
Public libraries deliver communities unrivalled access: 37% of the population in England has visited a library in the past 12 months, providing a strong base from which to deliver dementia services to the wider community. Around 50% of public library authorities in
England currently deliver designated dementia services and support. Initiatives include Memory Lane kits featuring picture and scrapbooks to create personal stories, DVDs and photographs, support groups and reading groups for people with dementia and their carers.

All of these have the potential to improve the quality of life for those participating by:

- Enhancing the day to day experience of living with dementia by encouraging socially responsible services that have better links to the community.
- Raising awareness, reducing stigma and minimising isolation of those living with the effects of dementia.
- Providing positive stories and role models for the public to challenge the negative stereotypes and fears surrounding diagnosis, and enable meaningful social engagement for people with dementia.
- Reconnecting communities and ensuring a better use of existing public resources and assets. Encouraging intergenerational use of publicly owned spaces, for example, leisure facilities, parks, museums and galleries.
- Reducing isolation by providing increased opportunities for taking part in community life.

**Reading Well**

RWBOP is a new English public library mental health service development. It originally provided self-help reading for adults based on cognitive behavioural therapy for a range of common mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression. Books can be recommended by GPs or other health professionals from an expert endorsed core list. They can be borrowed with or without ‘prescription’. The model is based on the pioneering work of clinical psychologist Professor Neil Frude. The original self help book prescription list was developed in 2004 on the basis of extensive consultation undertaken with mental health professionals to identify the titles they had used and found useful, and on the basis of efficacy being shown in research. From these suggestions an original list of 35 titles written predominantly by clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists was constructed.

RWBOP is delivered by an independent charity The Reading Agency, working in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), representing all English public libraries, and health partners including the Royal College of GPs, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal College of Nursing, The British Psychological Society, Mind, the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme (IAPT).

The scheme was launched in June 2013, and since then there has been an increase of 113% in loans of core list titles with over 275,000 people accessing the scheme.

**Dementia books on prescription**

The scheme is funded nationally by Arts Council England as part of their support for library development. A consultation was carried out by The Reading Agency between April and May 2014 focusing on what the policy framework should be. It aimed to explore the evidence base, the existing availability of self-help books and guides, and which issues and areas associated with dementia might be addressed through the scheme. A total of 47 organizations and individuals were sent a letter inviting them to complete the consultation questions. The aim was to build on existing knowledge, delivery models and book stock in
libraries, while local commissioning and funding models were used to take the project forward.

The initial consultation process looked at the National Dementia Strategy and considered several of the objectives of particular relevance to RWBOP:

- Improving public and professional awareness and understanding of dementia.
- Providing good quality information and support for those diagnosed with dementia and their carers.
- Supporting carers.
- Improving the quality of care within people’s homes, hospital wards and residential homes by better staff training and more appropriate psychosocial interventions.

**Book selection**

As a member of the Old Age Faculty executive, I became involved after the initial consultation process as part of a dementia experts group. This included members of the Alzheimer’s Society, the British Psychological Society, Innovations in Dementia, Dementia UK, Admiral Nurses, a person with dementia and a carer. Graham Turpin, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Sheffield University, who was involved in the first Reading Well scheme on common mental health problems and who was part of the consultation group, was also involved.

Our first meeting was in July 2014 with the aim of eventually creating a short list of 20-30 books. Prior to this, Debbie Hicks and Rose Vickerage of The Reading Agency had compiled a draft long list from a review of all of the existing public library lists and recommendations from the dementia stakeholder consultation process. This list of 80 was reduced to 50 by Janet Baylis of the Alzheimer’s Society. Books were excluded for a variety of reasons including being out of print and titles with negative content. Celebrity titles, local publications and those specific to another country were also rejected.

We had several meetings over the summer in the lovely surrounds of St Katherine’s Dock in the Alzheimer’s Society library. The selection in their library is vast and varied and Janet could probably give you an in-depth review of any book there. The selection process was a thoroughly enjoyable one and mostly harmonious (no Man-Booker like revelations I’m afraid!). Any discord was usually around the level of difficulty and discussions about whether we were “dumbing down” or alienating potential readers by including more professionally orientated books. There were a few contentious titles and we had several interesting discussions about whether we should include a book that was loved and loathed in equal measure. Unfortunately, as with all good book lists I am not allowed to name the particular books but you can scan the list yourself when it is released to surmise which books these may have been.

We discovered a number of interesting facts along the way. We couldn’t include ring binders or slim volumes in libraries: not robust enough for repeated loans and nowhere to place the bar code. Library shelves do not accommodate extra large or wide books and some authors still use the term dementia sufferer! We also realised that there are a dearth of titles on dementia for people with learning disabilities. The selection process was helped greatly by the participation of Keith Oliver, service user envoy from Kent and Medway NHS partnership trust; EDUCATE reading group and numerous libraries.
Book list
The list was eventually whittled down to 25 books covering a number of areas:

- Information and advice
- Living well with dementia
- Personal stories
- Support for carers
- Shared activities
- Caring in the final stages

Reading Well Books on Prescription for dementia will also signpost to a “mood boosting” list comprising a reader-recommended list of fiction and poetry. A separate “professionals list” will be created, which will be made available on the Reading Well website and linked to the Alzheimer’s Society online dementia catalogue.

I am afraid you will have to wait until January 2015 to see the final list for yourself but I would urge you all to recommend it to patients and carers whether they are library members or not. Although essentially a book list, it has the potential to be much more. Public libraries can play a key role in building dementia-friendly communities, providing support for carers and building a general awareness of and understanding about the condition. They provide a trusted and non-stigmatized public space within communities, community outreach and dementia aware staff, expert in information management and community engagement. Encouraging people affected by dementia in any way to find more information on the subject and to engage with others in the community can only help to destigmatise the condition and make our communities more dementia friendly.

User leaflets and leaflets providing information for prescribers will be available from local libraries from the end of January 2015. Health professionals can email readingwell@readingagency.org.uk to find out local library contact details. There will be a range of supporting resources for prescribers including information about featured titles and digital resources at http://readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/reading-well/