Independent expert views

Focus on dementia – January 2016

To accompany this publication we have sought the views of an expert in the field of dementia. These views are those of the individual and do not necessarily reflect the views of the HSCIC.

Commentary from Alistair Burns
Professor of Old Age Psychiatry
University of Manchester

Dementia is a clinical priority for the NHS. The personal, social and societal impact of the disorder is significant. There have been big improvements in dementia care and treatment over the last few years along with an immense increase in awareness of the condition. There has been a significant reduction in the number of people being prescribed an anti-psychotic drug, funding for dementia research is growing and there are over 1 million dementia friends nationally. The number of people with a formal diagnosis has increased from under forty percent to approaching seventy percent, fulfilling the NHS England ambition that two thirds of people with dementia should have a diagnosis.

Crucial to the provision of high quality care is the availability of information, something which the field of dementia has lacked in the last few years. This is now changing with the monthly diagnosis rates being available for each Clinical Commissioning Group, the NHS Atlas of Variation highlighting dementia, the Hospital Episode Statistics reports and the recent Public Health England Fingertips Tool have all been great examples of high quality information.

This excellent publication, Focus on dementia, from the HSCIC highlights dedicated information around the NHS Wellbeing Pathway (information on mortality and survival does not fit completely with dying well). Data on known risk factors for the development of dementia, national diagnosis rates, support for carers, information on the environment and statistics on survival all contain nuggets of information which will be extremely helpful in informing quality service improvement.

Moving forward, more granular detail about long term trends and geographical variation in information around dementia is important and this report provides an important benchmark for the future.