

NHS Lothian and dementia care

NHS Lothian is making significant progress in its work to provide the best possible support for patients with dementia and their carers. Initiatives are currently underway to ensure that healthcare professionals have the skills to identify dementia as early as possible.

Board Members were updated on the progress against the National Dementia Strategy at NHS Lothian's board meeting on Wednesday. This September a project is due to start which will see the development of a new dementia patient pathway, providing a more streamlined service for patients and carers.

NHS Lothian is also reviewing its strategy, making sure that it is fully in line with the Scottish Parliament's Alzheimer's Charter and the Scottish Government's new strategies on dementia and on support for carers.

Professor Alex McMahon, Acting Director of Strategic Planning and Modernisation, NHS Lothian, said: "Our aim is to make sure that patients with dementia and their carers get the best support we can provide.

"Naturally people have many concerns when they, or a loved one, are diagnosed with dementia. They need to be confident that the appropriate care will be available as, and when, it is needed.

"People often think of a diagnosis of dementia as sounding a death knell, but in fact they can often enjoy many good years ahead – our aim is to maximise the number of good years."

The existing NHS Lothian strategy already includes much of what the Scottish Government and the parliament want to see as standard for all. There is also evidence that efforts to encourage the earliest possible diagnosis of dementia is succeeding. GPs across Scotland now keep a dementia register,

and in Lothian this has seen identified cases rise from below 6,000 to 6,500.

However, NHS Lothian believes that at any one time there may be around 9,000 people with Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia or other, less common forms of dementia, in the region. It is hoped that the number of diagnoses can be further increased by enabling staff in acute hospitals to spot symptoms in patients who are admitted for entirely different reasons.

"Early diagnosis is very important, it means that we can start providing the right support and information for people straight away.

"We are carrying out a baseline study among medical and nursing staff in our acute division to make sure they can identify the symptoms quickly and accurately, and know exactly what to do to make sure that the patient and carers get the help they need," said Prof. McMahon.

A diagnosis of dementia can be highly traumatic so NHS Lothian is dedicated to making sure people are supported through the process.

This will help them understand their condition, the likely pattern of deterioration and what can be done to help.

Earlier this summer NHS Lothian organised a major event at which 180 GPs were brought together to ensure the widest possible knowledge and understanding of the best approach to dealing with dementia. The development of a specific patient pathway for dementia patients will begin in September as part of the Lean in Lothian project.

The idea is to use the skills and experience of staff across the systems to identify how services can best be joined up, and bottlenecks removed, to make the process as smooth and effective as possible for patients and carers.

In most cases patients can be supported in their own homes. A key aim is to ensure that they have the packages in place to allow them to be independent for as long as possible – this can mean physical adaptations to their homes or visits from professional care workers.