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National Clinical Director visits RUH

The National Clinical Director for Dementia, Professor Alistair Burns, said he was 'blown away' by all that he has seen around dementia care, during his visit to the Royal United Hospital today. The Professor was visiting the hospital to see how staff are raising standards for dementia care.

Towards the end of his visit he said: "The great thing for me is the enthusiasm; the staff are extremely motivated and caring and on top of that is their interest and enthusiasm for caring for people with dementia. I've been absolutely impressed overall with the RUH."

The Professor heard how we are aiming to diagnose dementia earlier and he also found out more about the RUH Charter Mark, which is helping our staff to ensure care for people with dementia is the very best that it can be.

Dr Chris Dyer, Consultant Geriatrician at the RUH, who welcomed Professor Burns to the hospital, explains how asking a 'dementia question' at the time patients are admitted to hospital will help in the diagnosis of dementia.

"Only 40% of people with dementia have actually been diagnosed. This may be because memory problems are dismissed as part of normal ageing, or because families feel uncomfortable broaching the subject with their loved ones.

"Dementia is a progressive condition that generally affects memory, mood and sometimes communication. Having a proper diagnosis is very important because there are certain medications that may help, and there are many ways in which support can be offered to patients and their families.

"At the RUH we are aiming to diagnose dementia earlier by asking our older patients (family or carers), whether that person has been more forgetful in the last 12 months to the extent that it has significantly affected their daily life. If the answer is "yes", further investigation will be undertaken with a view to follow up once that person is discharged. I would encourage everyone who is concerned about memory issues to take action and consult a healthcare professional or seek advice from the Alzheimer's Society website."

Dr Dyer also praised the success of the Charter Mark, which was developed with the voluntary organisation Alzheimer's Support. It provides a gold standard for staff to ensure care for people with dementia on all adult wards, not just those specifically for older people, is the very best it can be. So far, nine hospital wards and one outpatient area have been awarded the Charter Mark.

“People with dementia may feel sad, frightened or angry about what is happening to them in hospital, and a decline in their ability to talk, read and write can make it hard to understand medical problems or communicate with the staff caring for them. There is a growing demand on NHS staff, as professionals to have the ability to cope with all the individual needs of patients, whether they are clinical, emotional or psychological. The Charter Mark recognises our commitment and skill in doing that.

“We hope all wards will take on the Charter Mark challenge so we can bring our care of all dementia patients up to the gold standard.”

Readers may be interested finding out more about dementia by visiting the Department of Health website <http://dementiachallenge.dh.gov.uk/2012/09/21/talking-to-a-loved-one/>

Ends

Editor's Notes

Professor Burns is editor of the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Professor of Old Age Psychiatry at The University of Manchester. He is a Past President of the International Psychogeriatric Association, is on the board of the European Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, and is a member of the Council of the British Association for Psychopharmacology and the Medical Research Council College of Experts.

Applying for a Charter Mark

Each ward is being given the opportunity to apply for the Charter Mark, with three levels available - gold, silver and bronze. The standards cover four main areas of care: respecting and caring for people with dementia, the ward environment, meeting nutritional needs and suitability of staffing.

Within each of these areas there are then further markers of 'excellent care'. These include ensuring that care is person-centred and that feedback from patients and their carers show a high level of satisfaction. To be awarded the gold standard Charter Mark, signs on the wards must be easily understandable for people with dementia and every effort must be taken to prevent boredom by regular therapeutic sessions or activities.