

New Directions in Dementia

9th October, 2003; Liverpool, UK

On October 9th 2003 nearly 200 delegates from different countries and walks of life, met in the Maritime Museum in Liverpool, to consider and discuss new ways of thinking and new ways of providing services for people with dementia in Britain and beyond.

Robin Currie the Chief Executive of PSS a Social Care Charity in Liverpool, who in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society, had organised the conference, welcomed everyone with a message from Dame Judi Dench.

The first plenary session chaired by Mark Walker, Head of Regional service North of England, Alzheimers Society first heard Professor Mary Marshall Direct of Dementia Services Development Centre, Stirling University speak about how the three basic approaches to thinking about Dementia, the medical model, the social disability model and the citizenship model, should not be considered in competition with each other but should be seen as part of a total approach. 'We need all three all the time' she said. She talked about extending the Disability Discrimination Act beyond mobility, and sight and impairment, to include impairments which result from dementia. This would not be difficult or expensive and would benefit us all. We needed to be sharing our optimism with people outside the world of dementia and understanding the challenge for us all in maintaining the best care.

Sue Newton, Development Manager from PSS spoke about the 3 models of service- Adult Placement, Home Support, and Shared Group living that PSS provide as an alternative to institutional care for people with dementia. She told the personal story of one very confused woman who was isolated and vulnerable in the community, and is now happily living with an Adult placement Carer as part of Carers family. She explained how people with dementia could remain in their own home with a team of Home support workers coming in and providing one to one 24hour home support or they could live in a small group home with 2 other people with staff providing the support. She stressed the need for people with dementia to have the choice about where they live and the type of support they receive.

Professor John Ashton, Regional Director of Public Health for the North West, finished off the session by saying how important it was to identify and recognise demographic trends so we can be devising and implementing

the appropriate services. There is a third demographic transition. In 5 years time 50% of the population will be over 50. Some dementias are preventable such as those associated with Maturity Onset Diabetes, which is on the increase. With people living longer, who is going to do the caring? There has to be a cultural and social shift in people so they want to care for the older generation. We should be applying a whole systems approach to dementia and writing a blue print for ourselves for the future.

There followed three parallel sessions of a diverse selection of workshops so delegates could hear in detail about 'small scale ordinary living for people with dementia in Belgium' from Dr Anja Declerc, 'Housing issues and options for people with dementia' from Nigel Appleton Contract Consulting, 'Intermediate Care and dementia' from Barbara Lungalang and Rachel Smith Clinical Team Leaders, Mersey Care NHS Trust, to just mention a few.

The second Plenary session at the end of the conference presented two different perspectives from two different European countries.

Dr Nick de Boer, Psycho-geriatrician from Haarlem spoke about the situation in Holland where they are seeing an increase in dementia in younger people due to Korsykovs syndrome and Down's Syndrome as well as older people starting to drink heavily in later life. New developments in care include diagnostic centres, new medicines, and new means to support for old people and their relatives. He stressed the need for small housing units as they allow people to live in their own way, have autonomy, and are able to have meaningful relationships for people with dementia. He explained his plans to change the large nursing institution he is in charge of into small houses on ground floor facing outside, with flats above, and with a separate but linked central medical centre inside, providing support to them and the community. You can only build small housing units in Holland now, not large institutions.

Marie Jo Guisset then explained about the work of the Foundation Mederic Alzheimer in France. She described support initiatives which included information for people with dementia, support groups, living with memory loss by Alzheimers Australia, support programmes for caregivers, projects combining artistic and leisure activities, representation of people with dementia, and challenges for the future- risks and advantages of the early stage approach.

Robin Currie summed up the whole conference by saying that this was an exciting time, there was change all around us, new and different services were being set up offering a chance to people with dementia to live positive lives. There is still a lack of resources but we need to listen and to respond to what people with dementia and their relatives are saying. We must respond to cultural needs and recognise people's positive contribution to Society.

He thanked every one for sharing their knowledge and information and for making the day such an enjoyable one.

Sue Newton, PSS Conference Organiser, Liverpool



L-R: Robin Currie (Chief Exec, PSS), Dr Niek de Boer (Psycho-geriatrician from Haarlem, Netherlands), Marie- Jo Guisset (Foundation Mederic Alzheimer, Paris), Professor John Ashton (Regional Director Of Public Health for North West).