

VICTORIA MEDICAL CENTRE

Patient Participation Group Event

"Memory Loss"

Report of the PPG event held on Tuesday 6 February 2024 in the Group Room at VMC. A panel of speakers gave advice about the causes and effects of memory loss and the actions we can take to manage it as a patient or carer.

DR ANGUS KENNEDY Consultant neurologist Chelsea & Westminster Hospital

FRED MAIRET Owner and Director, Home Instead, Westminster, which provides a variety of home care services to support people living with dementia.

HANNAH MUNNS Open Age Senior Centre co-ordinator, South Westminster

Dr Kennedy opened the event by explaining that memory loss can be traced to a variety of causes, sometimes as a result of anxiety, in which case it can be alleviated by dealing with the stress. In other cases memory loss is caused by neurological problems affecting the brain and a person's ability to remember or make decisions. The umbrella word for this kind of brain disorder is dementia although he expressed his dislike of the word. Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia, the second most common is vascular dementia and there are several rarer conditions.

Alzheimer's is caused by the build-up of a toxic protein called amyloid that attacks and kills the brain cells. It can take years before it becomes obvious that something is wrong. Initially it presents itself as short-term memory loss – which can be irritating to family and friends and worrying at work – and gradually becomes more severe with personality changes, the inability to cope with simple tasks, especially involving sequences such as making a cup of tea, and eventually getting lost and forgetting the names of family, friends and everyday objects, at which point the person will need to have granted a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) to enable someone to manage their finances and care.

Do not hesitate to make decisions about your future sooner rather than later. Grant a legally valid LPA now with two trusted friends. It is your insurance that whatever happens to you, your finances and care will be in good hands. If you leave it too late and lose mental capacity, you will lose control of the decision making, and someone acting on your behalf may need to apply to the Court of Protection to be appointed as your 'deputy'. The waiting list for such an eventuality is currently around two years and the wait could have disastrous consequences on the quality of your care. In answer to questions, the panel confirmed that you don't need a GP grant an LPA, you can do it online yourself but you are advised to get legal advice to make sure that it is valid. (see Age UK service at the end of this report)

It was noted that around thirty percent of people in their 70s and 80s are suffering from Alzheimers. If you have a driving licence you will need to declare that you suffer from Alzheimer's when it is renewed. Nevertheless, doctors tend to be reluctant to recommend that someone should give up driving because it can cause depression and isolation.

In answer to questions Dr Kennedy said that there is currently no cure-all for dementia because it is caused by a variety of diseases requiring different treatments, but there are actions that can slow down its progression. If you are worried about your own loss of memory or you know someone who needs help, the important thing is to see a GP, get a diagnosis and start planning ahead.

The panel agreed that actions that we can all take to slow-down the onset of Alzheimer's include being active, eating a healthy diet, avoiding alcohol, and above all socialising. As the disease progresses people tend to become isolated and depressed. Please be kind to someone who is struggling to do everyday tasks. Don't shout at them, offer them help and friendship. Encourage them to socialise and continue to enjoy their favourite activities with your support.

Open Age activities. The charity Open Age South Westminster champions an active life for the Over-50s providing opportunities for people to take part in a vast range of activities, including those suffering from dementia and their carers. Contact Hannah Munns and her team on 020 4516 9969 about Open Age activities in South Westminster and find out more about their Time for Me Programme for unpaid carers by email to carerstimeforme@openage.org.uk or call 202 4516 9976 to receive the carers' full list of activities and outings.

Home Instead works with a range of charities in South Westminster and Pimlico providing Home Care, Live-in Care, Dementia Care and other help around the home to enable individuals to lead fulfilling lives in safe and familiar surroundings where they feel most comfortable. Social care is not available on the NHS unless you have assets worth less than £23,250, and care is not always an easy topic for discussion. Fred Mariet and his team are there to help you make an informed, compassionate choice for someone living with dementia.

Contact details: email: fred.mairet@homeinstead.co.uk tel: 020 3701 2682 mob 078 1065 5450 Website: www.homeinstead.co.uk/westminster

There were between 60 and 70 attendees. We owe a big thank-you to the backroom boys at VMC for conjuring up dozens of extra chairs. The meeting closed at 7.15.

Age UK Westminster offers a full LPA service, guiding you through the entire process.

Lasting Powers of Attorneys are legal documents that enable you, while you still have mental capacity, to appoint trusted loved one(s) to make decisions around your health and financial matters, should you lose capacity to make these for yourself. Whatever your age, it is important to consider your future and take time now to grant Power of Attorney to someone you trust. We now offer a service to guide you through the process with a face-to-face visit and ensuring all paperwork is submitted correctly to the Office of the Public Guardian. This is a paid for service, please contact us to find out more, discounts apply. For more information email: enquiries@ageukwestminster.org.uk