

Addressing the Challenges of Dementia in Prisons

On 28th March 2019 National Dementia Action Alliance (NDAA) and Alzheimer's Society ran an event to look at supporting people affected by dementia in, and being released from, prison. The half-day event saw a range of delegates from both the prison and health and social care sector come together to learn about and discuss issues affecting the prison population.

The event was expertly chaired by Adam Moll, Director of Criminal Justice Services at Penrose Criminal Justice Services, who was involved in a review of existing research on older prisoners to identify potential areas of good practice. Adam informed the room that there is little understanding of rates of dementia in prisons and that prisoners possess a physiological age that is approximately ten years older than their chronological age.

Natasha Sindano, Project Supporting Officer at Alzheimer's Society presented on the work that she has been doing in a number of prisons. She informed the room of numerous challenges that are faced by prisoners, including Category B prisoners often being in their cells for up to 23 hours a day. There are often regular changes of healthcare providers, resulting in an inconsistent service. Mental health teams are often trained in adult care, not *older* adult care. Natasha went on to speak about the measures that they are putting in place to ensure that prisoners with dementia are supported better, which include dementia awareness sessions with healthcare staff and prisoner representatives, and webinars/presentations to Clinical Dementia Networks. They have been doing some collaborative work with the Health Innovation Network for South London, looking to pilot DeAR-GP (a paper based case-finding tool that has been designed for use by care workers to identify people who are showing signs of dementia), and created a Top Tips guide for prison officers.

Sarah Tilsed, Campaigns & Partnerships Manager at NDAA followed by presenting on their campaign From Seldom Heard to Seen and Heard. This campaign features work on the issues faced by prisoners with dementia and recommendations on what can be done to combat these. Some of the issues that the NDAA discovered include prisoners often being moved from one prison to another before the information has been moved with them, making the journey more confusing. Additionally, diagnosis is necessary for the benefit of prisoners and prison staff, however there is a lack of training amongst prison staff meaning that dementia often goes unnoticed and therefore undiagnosed. Sarah spoke about the set of recommendations that were formulated to improve support for prisoners, starting with the need for a national strategy for older prisoners and a top tips booklet, which was then created by Alzheimer's Society. There is a need for early diagnosis, a pathway of care and joined up working, and training needs to be available to help staff identify when a prisoner is presenting symptoms of dementia. She ended by highlighting the need for prisons to have a mechanism for gathering and sharing information to support a better understanding of dementia.

Dr. Rachel Daly, a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at HMP Belmarsh posed the question in her presentation about older population who are released into the community and have become institutionalised and alienated from the community - how do we rebuild their lives? She mentioned that HMP Leicester is doing a lot of good work on making sure that they have identified accommodation in the older age group leaving prison. Rachel spoke about

the unsuitable environment, multiple physical and mental health issues, and the quality of prisoners' lives.

The last presentation of the day was by Robin Rolls, an Older Prisoners' Worker at Salvation Army working in HMP Frankland and HMP Wakefield. He has been working with those whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or national security and where they have an average of 46,000 incidents of self-injury per year. The prison have formed a group called Grey Matters, which brings together older prisoners so that they can have regular catch-ups with each other, talk about repentance and inspire hope within one another. He spoke about the need for collaboration, and how the prisons are working with Salvation Army, Age UK and Royal British Legion.

The day ended with group discussion work around changes that could be implemented within prisons and what we can all do to take this important piece of work forward.

