

Dealing with dementia

Mina Rodgers looks at the challenges facing Black and minority elders with dementia

Black and minority ethnic (BME) elders are generally under-represented in dementia services and the development of appropriate health and social care services to meet their needs.

Although population ageing means that the number of people with dementia overall will increase, the number of BME people with dementia will grow even more sharply.

This is because the frequency of dementia rises with age and the number of BME people in their seventies and eighties is growing steadily.

However, vascular dementia (caused by problems with the supply of blood to the brain) is thought to be more common among Asian and Black Caribbean people because they are more prone to risk factors for vascular dementia such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension and diabetes.

Despite what some people might think, dementia can affect everyone in society, irrespective of gender, ethnicity and socioec-



BME elders often have difficulty in accessing dementia services and sometimes experience greater levels of stigma © NPC

onomic status.

However, there is evidence that BME people with dementia present their problems later to dementia services than do their white British counterparts, when their dementia has become more severe.

One of the reasons for this might be that levels of stigma may be higher among Asian, Irish, Black Caribbean and Eastern European older people and carers.

Religious beliefs may also account for some stigma among Asian people. For instance, among those who believe in

Re-incarnation, dementia may be seen as a punishment for behaviour in a past life.

Research with Black Caribbean and Irish people also suggests they are more inclined to see dementia as a 'mental illness', rather than the result of physiological changes in the brain, whereas for Eastern Europeans, stigma may relate to experiences of persecution and the need to 'keep face'.

Services for BME people include housing, day care, home care, residential care homes and advocacy.

In services which are not aimed at a specific ethnic group, recruiting an ethnically diverse group of staff – especially those who are bilingual – or appointing link workers who can engage with local communities, has been seen as important in improving service uptake among BME people with dementia.

Specialist advocacy services can also make links between services and BME communities, but more funding is needed to ensure that people in the ethnic communities are given the help and care needed to live a happy and fulfilling life in their old age.

The first difficulty BME people with dementia and their carers face is accessing services and being able to choose care and support in the forms that they would like.

These difficulties arise from what seem to be the lower levels of awareness about dementia and greater levels of stigma among some communities.

There is no doubt that this issue poses a serious challenge to society, and much more research and support needs to be provided to both sufferers and their carers - many of whom are themselves pensioners.

The NPC will therefore be campaigning on this issue over the coming months.

Will the new cap on care costs be fit for purpose?

From April 2016, the government claims the costs of social care will be capped at £72,000, but the actual system won't be as straightforward as it sounds.

To start with, you have to get into the system and only individuals deemed eligible for care

will have their spending count towards the cap.

However, because access to services is rationed to people with high care needs, around 1.5m older people won't even be in the system and any expenses they incur will not count towards the cap at all.

Those in a care home will also have to pay for accommodation costs, so out of a care home bill of £574 a week, £230 will not go towards the cap as it is for living costs.

Finally, an individual's bill only racks up at the rate a council would pay for a place in the care

home and not what they are actually paying.

Many care home providers say this does not cover the true cost of care so they charge people funding themselves more.

That is why by the time a person reaches the cap they may have paid much more.

Keep on contributing

Gulnaheer Khan looks at the contribution made by older Londoners

Every year the London Older People's Assembly takes place in City Hall. The latest subject for discussion was "The economic contribution of older Londoners", and this report aims to identify and value the economic contribution older Londoners make through their life: caring for adults, childcare and volunteering. The report found that Londoners age 50 and above contribute through their paid and unpaid work.

London is a relatively young place compared to the rest of England, but it still has between 1 to 2m older residents.

These older Londoners are ethnically diverse and well educated compared with their peers in other English regions.

Around 39 per cent of London elders are regular volunteers, undertaking some form of voluntary activity at least two or three times per month.

The report also revealed that Londoners aged over 50 contribute an impressive £53bn to the economy.

Whilst this report attempts to quantify the contribution older Londoners make through their

paid and unpaid work and to show older Londoners themselves the significant value of their contributions to the capital, it should be noted that of course these contributions do not capture everything that older Londoners bring to the city.

More widely, older people are now estimated to bring £61bn into the economy more than they receive back in pensions, health care and benefits.

However, the vast majority, 92% in a recent poll by the Guardian said they felt older people's skills, knowledge and experience were not valued by society.

This has got to change.

Universal benefits in the spotlight

David Cameron's commitment to maintain universal pensioner benefits if he remains Prime Minister after May 7 has again sparked a debate about a phoney war between the generations.

A number of think-tanks and media commentators were quick to argue that older people were being cushioned from austerity, whilst younger people were struggling.

The group Policy Exchange also argued that people should have to opt-in to receive the winter fuel allowance and the state pension should be subject to the welfare cap imposed by the government.

Yet the facts don't support the claim that the generations are divided.

Both young and old have a poverty rate of 1 in 5 and they share concerns about housing and public transport.

What really lies behind these attacks is a desire to take the attention away from bankers, financial markets and the City for their role in the economic crisis.

Claude James, Chair of the NPC Minority Elders' Committee said: "It wasn't pensioners who caused the crisis, yet we seem to be taking the blame."

"We're fed up with being told we're getting something for nothing, when every year our generation puts back billions of pounds into society more than we receive in pensions, benefits and care through our taxes, volunteering and unpaid caring."

Remembering Bill Guy

The NPC was saddened to hear of the recent death of Bill Guy; one of its well known members from the London region and minority elders' committee.

Bill was born in British Guyana in 1933 and as a young man went to live in New York, before joining the American navy.

In the 1950s, he arrived in Tottenham and faced the "No blacks, no Irish, no dogs" signs that were common in Britain at the time.

Bill started his working life here as a guard on London Underground before becoming a bus driver.

In his later years he also represented Britain in the over 55 games and won the 200 metres sprint.

He was active in his trade union, Labour party and local com-



Bill Guy taking part in the 2010 NPC lobby of Parliament © NPC

munity - and was a regular steward at NPC events around the

country.

He will be sadly missed.

Commonwealth Fair a success for NPC

The Commonwealth Fair is an annual event that takes place at the Kensington Town Hall in November.

It's a very colourful affair, where every Commonwealth nation is represented, and where one can sample the culture and cuisine of the world at

large.

The event is held over three floors where stalls are laid out and vendors work hard to attract visitors.

This year, for the first time the NPC Minority Elders' Committee decided to participate and were busy attracting interest and giv-

ing out information.

One of the big concerns remained over the 'frozen' state pension issue which affects many of the countries involved.

Given it's success, the NPC intends to go again and try and maximise the publicity for our cause.

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