

Dementia set to double globally, WISH to stop it

The World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH), spearheaded by Qatar Foundation, published its report yesterday, 17 February 2015, to tackle the global rise in dementia and identify triggers for treatment, care and funding. The research shows that worldwide 44 million people live with dementia - alarmingly this figure is likely to triple by 2050, to 135 million people.



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Dementia is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people worldwide. In 2010 the global cost of care reached an estimated US \$604 billion worldwide, equivalent to 1% of the global gross domestic product - meaning if dementia care were a country, it would be the world's 18th largest economy. With such huge social and financial burdens, WISH aims to lead the world's healthcare community in addressing this devastating and prevalent disease.

Global understanding of dementia lags behind other diseases, often mistaken as a normal part of aging. Whilst there continues to be a social stigma surrounding dementia, the level of necessary funding will not be addressed equivalent to the need - in the US funding for HIV/AIDS research is more than five times the level of that for dementia research, despite the fact there are five times as many Americans with dementia than with HIV.

To encourage global focus on this growing epidemic WISH chose dementia as a research theme and appointed Ellis Rubinstein, President and CEO of the New York Academy of Sciences, as Chair of the Dementia Forum. Over the past year Rubinstein has led a multidisciplinary team of distinguished experts, drawn from around the world to research and provide recommendations about the prevention and treatment of dementia focussing on three core themes; prevention, diagnosis and care, and cure.

Report's Focus

Dementia has severe effects on the quality of life of individuals and causes tremendous strain on both caregivers and healthcare systems. The costs of providing dementia care are substantial - and unsustainable - and a reliance on informal care in high-, middle- and low-income countries predominates.

There is therefore an increasing and urgent need to identify and disseminate innovative and cost-effective approaches to early diagnosis and disease management. The World Dementia Council and other organisations have called for the development of a cure or disease-modifying therapy by 2025. Alongside work to progress this ambition, there is also significant work being undertaken in prevention and risk reduction, as well as diagnosis and care.

The report provides an overview of the global dementia landscape - spanning the key themes noted above to the four main mechanisms to improve outcomes for individuals with dementia. These include awareness, education and participation; research, trials and regulation; health and social care systems; and financial innovation.

Policy recommendations

The report explores a wide range of dementia-related issues, including the current barriers and challenges to addressing dementia, and innovative solutions; including raising public awareness, care innovations, new financial models better regulatory frameworks. The report offers 10 key policy recommendations for governments to consider, aimed at improving both outcomes for individuals living with dementia and for economies struggling to pay for the costs of caring for dementia.

The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. develop a plan to address dementia nationally
2. increase awareness of dementia
3. expand healthy living to include brain health
4. improve the evidence base for dementia
5. improve dementia care
6. strengthen integrated and co-ordinated health and social care systems
7. institute and fund longitudinal studies
8. reduce barriers to drug development
9. commit government investment of at least 1% of a country's cost of care
10. facilitate innovative finance mechanisms

Rubinstein said, "It's clear that there is not one simple panacea for dementia that lies just beyond our reach; rather, it will take the concerted and integrated efforts of leaders and innovators in all sectors to move the needle on this extraordinary social and economic challenge. This is why we are counting on WISH."

Professor The Lord Darzi of Denham, Executive Chair of WISH, said, "The social and economic burden of dementia is clear enough today. Yet the future costs to societies and economies will be enormous without significant intervention now to change the course of this global disease. It is the aim of WISH to offer evidence-based actionable recommendations to health-minsters and policymakers globally so that we may all work to reduce the prevalence of this disease."

More reports from WISH

Dementia is one of eight reports being presented at the 2015 WISH Summit taking place in Qatar, where leading international health experts are joining an influential community of heads of state, government ministers, academics, clinicians, policy makers and business leaders have met to discuss innovative solutions to some of the most pressing global health challenges.

As well as Dementia, WISH will publish reports on Communicating Complex Health Messages, Diabetes, Delivering Affordable Cancer Care, Patient Safety, Universal Health Coverage, Mental Health and Wellbeing in Children, and Maternal and Newborn Health.

For more information, go to www.wish.org.qa.

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