

Press Release

The needs of people with dementia as rated by their carers

Irish people are living longer and the number of Irish people with dementia (such as Alzheimer's disease) is set to rise. People with dementia need high levels of care, usually primarily provided by family, so they can remain at home for as long as possible. The work done by carers in thousands of homes around the country needs to be acknowledged, understood and supported.

- A study led by Dr Aileen Freyne, a Consultant Psychiatrist in St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin, aimed to better understand the needs of carers and those in their care. Dr Freyne and colleagues conducted in-depth interviews with forty carers of people with dementia so as to better understand (a) their needs and (b) gaps in services.
- *Over half of carers described psychological distress because of their role.*
- Over half the people cared for had memory or psychological needs. A need for daytime activities (47.5%) was commonly reported, along with a need for suitable accommodation and help with finances (35%). Carers noted a delay in accessing key supports such as occupational therapy and home help.
- Carers also wanted clearer information about support services that they could access, and some carers suggested a centralised source of such information.
- *In conclusion, the study found that, among people with dementia in Ireland, there was a high level of need for care, with a high level of unmet need.*
- The authors recommend firstly that people developing dementia be referred early to specialised services for assessment. This will assist with the provision of information about support services and planning for the future.
- A very concrete and practical recommendation of the authors is the rollout of 'Dementia Care Co-ordinators'. This person could be a social worker, nurse or occupational therapist trained in dementia care, who would work in the community to form a link between families and services.
- It is important that service planners take people's likely care needs into account when setting up new services.

ENDS

The original article can be found in the June 2010 edition of the *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* (Irish J Psych Med 2010; 27(2): pages 72-76).