



ICPCM Newsletter

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The Dementia Friendly Community and Person Centeredness

Prof. Jon Snaedal

President, International College of Person Centered Medicine

No person is immune against developing dementia, a syndrome that involves impairment of many dimensions of cognition such as memory, language and abilities to organize daily life. In some cases, the personality itself is affected but most often, the symptoms and behaviour of a demented individual can be understood on the basis of healthy (or unhealthy) coping skills.

In a recent action plan, published by the World Health Organization (WHO) it is stated that there is no effective prevention, treatment or cure for major diseases causing dementia and that communities need to adopt action plans for awareness and support [1].

General awareness and preparedness for dementia is important, as so many will be affected either as a patient or as a relative. Dementia hits in various ways and therefore there are few general ways of dealing with this fate. Creativity and personalized approach is needed. For this, the narrative of the patient and next of kin must form the cornerstone of approaches as responses to the needs have to be highly personalized [2]. For this, the concept personhood was created some 30 years ago [3] and is currently forming the basis of many current philosophical approaches in dementia care such as the Eden alternative [4] and dementia care mapping [5]. The former is general in the sense that it involves understanding and accommodating the needs for all elderly but has also been adopted specifically for demented individuals in care facilities. Dementia care mapping is however focusing on how the staff is trained to be better equipped to deal with the various challenges of dementia care. However, the personalized approach needs to reach society as a whole and thus the concept of “dementia friendly community” [6] has been created. The basis for creating dementia friendly societies is thus the experience of an individual with dementia and this is used as a fundament for increasing awareness and support. As described on the home page of the Alzheimer Society in the UK “a dementia-friendly community is a city, town or village where people with dementia are understood, respected and supported[7].” This concept has been evolving and there is increasing focus on special settings such as in the health care service [8].

In an ever more complex and digitalized society, the everyday tasks are getting more difficult for those that are loosing the abilities for complex activities of daily living. Many services are currently being digitalized such as travel, banking services and even everyday shopping. The various programs for dementia friendly communities are therefore not only focusing on awareness and support but also on technical solutions. Many aspects of personalized approaches are integrated into training and education. An

example is the training of staff in shops and stores or security personnel on how to face and serve an individual with cognitive impairment. Another personalized example is the Dementia friend initiative [9] in which an individual is trained in communicating and supporting a person with dementia, wherever that might be. In some communities dementia friends champions groups have been formed where trained volunteers are encouraging others to learn about dementia. They run information session and inspire others to help those living with dementia in order to increase their sense of well-being and to preserve quality of life. All of these initiatives are excellent examples on how personalized approach is reaching the meso- and macro levels.

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[9] Hebert C.A and Scales K. Dementia friendly initiatives: A state of the science review. *Dementia* 2019;18(5) 1858-95. doi: 10.1177/1471301217731433.