

Daily Telegraph 2nd April 2014

Doctor's warning over dementia targets

SETTING targets for the number of people that should be diagnosed with dementia could lead to "substantial harm" to patients, a GP has said.

An urgent debate is needed before such practices "get out of hand" and lead to patients being diagnosed unnecessarily in an attempt to hit targets tied to financial gains, Dr Martin Brunet said. In November, Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, published a "dementia map" enabling people to look up diagnosis rates in their area. He said the map would drive up standards. But

writing in the *British Medical Journal*, Dr Brunet said setting targets and "naming and shaming" areas that do not have high rates was leading to pressure to over-diagnose.

Dr Brunet, from Godalming, Surrey, said clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) – groups of GPs looking after the NHS funds – were already tying diagnosis rates to income.

He said Herefordshire CCG had written to local GPs stating: "The CCG needs to increase prevalence to 40 per cent by April 2014 and 50 per cent by

April 2015 – and will lose significant income if we miss these targets."

Dr Brunet said: "The making of a diagnosis is a key moment in a patient's journey. It can bring great benefit by opening the door to effective treatments and support as well as giving a much-needed explanation for worrying symptoms. But it can also bring great harm if incorrect."

Dr Brunet said that dementia is a "big business" and there are many vested interests that "stand to benefit from a rise in the number of diagnoses".