

Good care is a right

As Britain's population gets older, the challenge of dealing with dementia becomes more widespread. In a moving article on these pages, Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, writes of the uncertainty surrounding how much sufferers understand what is happening to them – of the “gradual deadening of emotional connections that have long sustained lives and friendships”. He adds that nearly a million families could be facing this problem by the end of the decade.

Mr Hunt is announcing that £300 million will be committed to further research in the next parliament and that work is being done globally to launch the first international dementia research fund. In addition, the Government wants society to be better prepared for tackling dementia – with training for NHS staff and citizens to better help them understand the condition and assist those with it. The principle behind this effort is obviously to ensure that dementia does not become a prison sentence, locking someone away indoors and isolating them from the community. This medical condition has to be fought and any suffering associated with it reduced.

This newspaper has also raised the problem of poor care, and the need to improve services for the elderly in general. Recently, the Care Quality Commission revealed that one in five nursing homes in England does not have enough hands on duty to ensure that residents get “good, safe care”. This can be a particular problem for dementia sufferers: for example, it takes a qualified nurse to recognise the signs that they are in pain. Care-home and home-care staff ought to be properly trained, licensed and paid. Families need to know that they are leaving their loved one with professionals they can trust. Good care should be, ultimately, a human right.

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