Alzheimer Scotland

Health and Sport Committee – Healthcare in Prisons

Introduction

Alzheimer Scotland is Scotland’s leading dementia voluntary organisation. We work to improve the lives of everyone affected by dementia through our campaigning work nationally and locally and through facilitating the involvement of people living with dementia in getting their views and experiences heard. We provide specialist and personalised services to people living with dementia, their families and carers in over 60 locations and offer information and support through our 24 hour freephone Dementia Helpline, our website (www.alzscot.org) and our wide range of publications.

General Comments

The ageing population of prisoners and staff is increasing and presents a considerable challenge to the Scottish Prison Service. As the prevalence of dementia increase in the population as a whole in Scotland, so too has the number of people in prison with dementia. In addition to identifying the need for research to identify more accurate figures into the number of people with dementia in Scotland, Health Scotland’s ‘Dementia and equality – meeting the challenge in Scotland’ report, published in August 2016, contains the following recommendation:

‘Increase recognition among, and support for, the prison workforce for the rising number of people with dementia, of all ages, within prison populations; research further the prevalence and impact of dementia in this group.’

In relation to these issues, Alzheimer Scotland has undertaken work with staff and prisoners in Her Majesty’s Prison (HMP) Shotts, led by Lorna Hart, Dementia Advisor.

HMP Shotts – Dementia Friendly project

HMP Shotts contacted Alzheimer Scotland to carry out Dementia Awareness with prisoners and staff in response to their experience with an ageing population both in terms of staff and prisoners. Alzheimer Scotland has established the partnership with HMP Shotts in April 2016, initially commencing with the delivery of Dementia Awareness sessions for both prisoners and staff. The aim of these sessions was to increase both groups understanding of dementia. At these sessions, some of the prisoners identified themselves as having a diagnosis of dementia and the problems this presented on a daily basis. In addition, the sessions led to discussions with staff about the changing nature of their role and the demands this placed on them; as part these discussions, the challenge of supporting individuals as their condition progressed became apparent.

Following this initial awareness raising, Alzheimer Scotland has also work has involved providing Dementia Friends training sessions with staff and engages with senior management to have discussions about Dementia Friendly environments in the prison setting both in the workplace itself and in the cells. In addition, Alzheimer Scotland staff attended prison ‘health days’ to provide information and advice about dementia to prisoners, as well as attending at family visiting days with our ‘Memory Bus’. As of February 2017, 96 prisoners and staff have taken part in dementia awareness sessions or dementia friends training sessions, with additional dates scheduled for future.
In undertaking this work, Alzheimer Scotland aims to increase awareness of dementia, support people living with dementia to live well with the illness and also sets out to tackle stigma and improve inclusion. Our intention is that by engaging both staff and prisoners, this will have a positive impact by allowing people to seek support when they need it and also inform colleagues, friends and families, raising knowledge to the wider community.

Staff had initially expressed some uncertainty about the signs and symptoms of dementia, noting that some these overlapped with withdrawal symptoms. In addition, staff were able to identify instances where both prisoners and staff could be supported where they may find tasks or work more challenging as a result of their condition. The staff within HMP Shotts have suggested that Alzheimer Scotland become a regular face in the prison for more awareness for staff, as they have come across difficult situations and are unsure how to cope, and to support the staff with general increased awareness.

Alzheimer Scotland continues to hold regular meetings with senior managers at HMP Shotts about how to continue working together and future areas of work and have been invited to sit on the Multi-Disciplinary Team for Health. In the immediate future, there are plans to:

- Hold awareness sessions with health centre staff/programme staff and governor suite.
- Hold further awareness sessions at family/visiting days.
- Review the work in March 2017.

Alzheimer Scotland is happy for this evidence submission to be published on the committee’s website. A copy will also be placed on Alzheimer Scotland’s website.

Owen Miller
Policy Officer, Alzheimer Scotland
28 February 2017