Health and social care systems in crisis, charities tell Government

The report, entitled Destined to ‘sink or swim together’, shows that funding one service in isolation can’t prop up the others, and if they aren’t all funded, they risk collapsing altogether.

This is a sobering thought. Currently, more than one in four people in England are living with a long-term health problem. Last year the number of people waiting for an NHS operation topped 4.3 million - a ten year high.

Yet NHS spending grew at one of the lowest rates in its history between 2010/11 and 2014/15, and over the last seven years spending on adult social care has fallen by 8 per cent in England - further exacerbating demands on embattled NHS services which deal with over one million people every 36 hours in England alone.

The Richmond Group of Charities, which produced the report, comprises 14 help groups, including Age UK, which is particularly focused on representing the needs of those later in life.

Pointing out that an estimated 4 million older people in the UK are living with a longstanding illness, the charity explains: “We’re calling on the Government to deliver an ambitious funding package, and to take decisive action that sets the NHS, the social care system and public health on the right path for the future together.”

Chair of the Richmond Group of Charities, Chris Askew, who is also chief executive of Diabetes UK, adds: “We know that the only effective means of rectifying the health and social care crisis is to invest in services that support people to stay as well as possible for as long as possible.

“We all know the NHS is grossly underfunded but, unless we also fill the funding gaps in social care and public health, pumping money into one aspect of our health and social care system won’t make a sustainable difference. It’s a case of sink or swim together.

“Without decisive action from Government, this situation is going to go from bad to worse.”

Healthy older people do not benefit from taking aspirin, says NHS

Millions of healthy people who take aspirin to ward off illness in old age are unlikely to benefit from the drug, a trial has found.

Aside from its painkilling properties, aspirin can also thin the blood - so it is often recommended for people with risk factors that mean they could have a blood clot, and then a heart attack or stroke triggered by the clot. This usually includes people with a history of heart disease or strokes.

Researchers wanted to see if aspirin also had benefits for older adults with no history of cardiovascular disease.

More than 19,000 healthy older people were randomly divided into two groups. One group received aspirin and the other a placebo, and the participants were followed for over four years.

There was no difference between the two groups in the combined outcome of death, disability or dementia.

Neither was there a significant difference in the rates of cardiovascular disease.

However, people in the aspirin group had higher rates of major internal bleeding (an uncommon but serious side effect of aspirin) than those in the placebo group.

People in the aspirin group had higher rates of major internal bleeding

The NHS website states: “This study supports current understanding that for older adults with no previous history of cardiovascular disease, the benefits of taking aspirin are small and do not outweigh the risks.

“If, however, you have been advised to take aspirin due to a history of cardiovascular disease you should not stop taking it without first talking to your GP.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/healthy-older
Exercise ‘doesn’t slow’ progression of dementia

A trial in which people with dementia took part in a moderately intense exercise programme for four months found their mental decline did not slow and may even have worsened faster than in people who did not take part in the programme.

The disappointing results are a setback for researchers, who had hoped an exercise programme might improve people’s ability to carry out everyday tasks such as washing and dressing. They said they cannot exclude the possibility that exercise may have made dementia worse, although the differences in decline were small.

While the exercise programme did improve people’s physical fitness, at least in the short term, it did not improve their quality of life or ability to care for themselves, or the quality of life of those caring for them.

“It’s important to note this does not change what we know about exercise’s ability to protect against dementia,” stresses the NHS website, continuing: “People who exercise more are less likely to get dementia, possibly because it maintains blood flow to the brain.

“However, once the brain has been damaged by dementia, exercise may not help prevent further damage.”

The study was carried out by researchers from the University of Oxford, Coventry and Warwick Partnership Trust and John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. It was funded by the National Institute of Health Research and published in the peer-reviewed British Medical Journal.

Funeral costs under the spotlight

The cost of dying has risen up the political agenda following two recent announcements.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) launched a study into the cost of funerals in November 2018, shortly after HM Treasury revealed it is looking to design a regulatory framework for pre-paid funeral plans.

The CMA opened its study as a result of large price rises in funeral costs. Funeral director prices increased by 68 per cent and crematoria fees rose by 84 per cent over the last 10 years. By comparison, inflation (CPI) increased by around 25 per cent over this time.

People now generally spend between £3,000 and £5,000 organising a funeral - more than those on the lowest incomes spend on food, clothing and energy combined in a year.

Issues being looked at under the CMA investigation include the fact that many undertakers do not make their prices available online, making it difficult to compare options easily. The study is also exploring whether a lack of competition could be pushing up prices, particularly in rural areas - and whether the fact that those organising funerals are typically distressed renders them especially vulnerable to exploitation.

Pre-pay firms offer a selection of options, typically ranging from around £2,000 to £6,000. The pre-paid funeral industry has grown rapidly in recent years with highly targeted and consistent advertising. Once you buy, the pre-paid firm contacts an undertaker and guarantees that, no matter how much funeral directors’ fees rise, you will get your final send-off at today’s prices.

But although pre-paid funeral plans allow people to manage costs and the type of funeral they would like for themselves, there are concerns about a lack of transparency - hence the reason that HM Treasury is looking to strengthen regulation in this sector.

CWU Retired Members’ Advisory Committee member Brian Lee concludes: “Research suggests that the funeral market does not seem to work as well as it should, and it is clear that funeral poverty is increasing.

“We await the CMA and HM Treasury reports because there is an urgent need for greater transparency, simpler processes, information on costs and choice for customers at what can be a very difficult time for those affected.”

Full story at rm.cwu.org/news/funeral/
Doorstep scams commonly target older people. In fact, 85 per cent of victims of doorstep scams are aged 65 and over, according to National Trading Standards. Brian Lee sought advice from Age UK about some simple steps that can help you stay safe on your doorstep.

Doorstep scams take place when someone comes to your door and tries to gain access to your home. Doorstep scammers aren’t always pushy and persuasive, they may seem polite or friendly. So, if you’re not expecting someone, it’s important to be vigilant when you answer the door, especially if you live on your own.

It can be very easy to fall victim to a scam, but you can be scam savvy if you know what to look out for.

**COMMON TYPES OF DOORSTEP SCAMS?**

There are many different types of doorstep scams, but some of the most common ones include:

- **Rogue traders:** A cold-caller may claim to have noticed something about your property that needs work or improvement, such as the roof, and offer to fix it for cash at an inflated price.

- **Bogus officials:** People claim to be from a utility company as a way of gaining access to your home. Always check the ID of any official, and if they’re genuine they won’t mind waiting while you check.

- **Fake charity collections:** A fraudster may pretend they’re from a charity and ask you to donate money, clothes or household goods. Legitimate charities will all have a charity number that can be checked on the Charity Commission website.

- **Made-up consumer surveys:** Some scammers ask you to complete a survey so they can get hold of your personal details, or use it as cover for persuading you to buy something you don’t want or need.

- **Hard luck stories:** Someone may come to your door and ask you to help them out with cash, ask to use your telephone or claim they’re feeling unwell. Be aware the intention could be to con you out of money or gain access to your home.

**HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?**

There are things you can do to deter doorstep scammers and feel safer when answering the door, such as:

- **Putting up a deterrent sign.** You could get a ‘no cold callers’ sign up on your door or window, which should deter any cold callers from knocking on your door.

- **Setting up passwords for utilities.** You can set up a password with your utility companies to be used by anyone they send round to your home. Phone your utility company to find out how to do this.

- **Nominating a neighbour.** Find out if you have a nominated neighbour scheme where a neighbour can help to make sure if callers are safe. Contact your local Neighbourhood Watch (www.ourwatch.org.uk) or your Safer Neighbourhood police team to find out more.

**ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER:**

- Only let someone in if you’re expecting them or they’re a trusted friend, family or professional. Don’t feel embarrassed about turning someone away.

- Don’t feel pressured. Don’t agree to sign a contract or hand over money at the door. Think about it and talk to someone you trust.

- Check credentials. You should always check someone’s credentials – a genuine person won’t mind. You can phone the company they represent or check online, but never use contact details they give you.

- Don’t share your PIN. Never disclose your PIN number or let anyone persuade you to hand over your bank card or withdraw cash.

- Call the police. Call the police non-emergency number 101 if you’re not in immediate danger but want to report an incident. But call 999 if you feel threatened or in danger.
New children’s book explores dementia

Dementia is often difficult enough for adults to comprehend, but what about younger children? Journalist and author Juliet Rix has written a new book, *Travels with My Granny*, to help explain what can be a confusing topic for youngsters.

A few years ago Juliet Rix was conducting interviews for a newspaper article and, in preparation for the piece, she visited a couple in their eighties – a woman with dementia and her husband who acted as her primary carer. The man was speaking about his wife’s condition and the fact that a couple of carers came to help with some of the more physical tasks he was unable to do, such as getting her up in the morning or getting her ready for bed, which often upset her.

“He said to me: ‘You would get upset, wouldn’t you, if someone tried to undress you while you were stood on a bridge?’ recalls Juliet. “Those words really stuck with me, that idea of a dementia patient feeling they’re somewhere else, and therefore becoming distressed by what’s happening to them. It made me think about how, to an outside observer, someone with dementia might appear to be behaving very strangely, but to the person with dementia, what they’re doing may have perfectly good internal logic.”

At the time Juliet had recently started writing for children, and it struck her it would be a good idea to write something about living with dementia, to explain to children what’s going on. “If an adult is behaving weirdly, that’s quite frightening to a kid. But, if you can understand that the person might be somewhere else, it’s a bit like daydreaming, and we all do that. If you can understand it like that, it stops being so scary, and you can learn to talk to people.”

The resulting book, which features vibrant illustrations by Christopher Corr, is a colourful story acting as an all-purpose way to explore dementia with the very young. The book focuses on the idea of travelling somewhere else to explain what people with dementia are going through. Here’s a little summary: Granny’s legs won’t carry her much further than the door, but she still travels. And sometimes she takes her grandchild with her. The grown-ups think Granny doesn’t know where she is, but grandchild thinks Granny knows exactly where she is, it just isn’t where the grown-ups are....

Juliet explains: “What I’m hoping is, having read this book with your kids, when you come across someone who has dementia, who’s confused and behaving in an otherwise inexplicable way – be it in your own family, a neighbour or someone in the local supermarket – you can say to your child that maybe he or she is travelling. I wonder where they are today?”

POSTIVE REACTIONS

The book has gathered praise from experts in dementia. “Such a gentle, positive and fascinating way of introducing a child to dementia, this will prove valuable to so many families,” says Tessa Gutteridge, director of YoungDementia UK. “A really positive way of educating children about dementia – great!” is the verdict of Clive Ballard, Alzheimers Society former head of research, and now Dean of Exeter University Medical School.

Juliet concludes: “As well as helping children to understand, I also hope kids have fun reading it because it’s about lots of places in the world and the nice relationship between a granny and a child.”

COMPETITION:
The CWU has three copies of *Travels with My Granny* to give away. For your chance to win a free copy send your name and address to: ‘Travels with My Granny’ competition, C/O Marcia Murray, CWU, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX or email mmurray@cwu.org by Friday April 26, 2019.

Travels with My Granny is out now via Otter-Barry Books. See www.otterbarrybooks.com/travels-with-my-granny for more information and ordering details. Article reproduced courtesy of Age UK.

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