

Speaking Notes
Terry Martin, MLC, Member for Elwick
Opening of Dementia Research Seminar
Thursday, 21 September 2006
Hadley's Hotel

Good afternoon everyone.

I'm delighted to be here representing the Minister for this very significant event ... timed to coincide with World Alzheimer's Day.

The Minister was very disappointed that she was unable to make it in person ... and she's asked me to convey her sincere apologies and wish you all the best during your discussions today.

This seminar provides a vital opportunity to showcase the world class research on dementia currently happening at the University of Tasmania.

It also highlights the significant burden that the disease places upon communities.

The importance of research into the causes, possible cures and care of dementia cannot be over emphasised.

Living with dementia can be an emotional and physical burden for all involved.

I'm aware that people with moderate and advanced dementia typically need round-the-clock care and supervision.

They may require assistance with basic activities such as eating, bathing and dressing.

And meeting these needs takes patience, understanding and care.

Research into dementia is particularly important when you consider the growing prevalence of the disease ... the associated cost to the community ... and the significant stress and burden that it places on not only those who have the condition, but the families and carers who look after them.

Some estimates suggest that by 2050, the number of Australians with dementia will be close to three percent of the projected population.

In Tasmania, that represents a threefold increase ... or a jump from around 5,350 people with dementia to 14,340 people.

As you are all no doubt aware, the increasing prevalence of dementia is associated with our ageing population.

While dementia is not a natural part of the ageing process, some 24 percent of those aged over 85 are affected by the disease.

Our population is ageing so rapidly that over the next 40 years the proportion of Australians above the age of 65 is predicted to double.

It's also forecast that Tasmania will soon have the highest proportion of older people of any State or Territory.

By the year 2031, around one in every five Tasmanians will be aged over 65 years.

When you consider that dementia is said to be the greatest single contributor to the burden of disease due to disability at older ages ... as well as the greatest single contributor to the cost of residential aged care ... there's no doubt that its increasing prevalence will have a very significant impact in the future on health, aged and community care services.

In fact, a very large increase in health care costs is predicted.

It's been estimated that in Australia over the next 30 years there will be an increase in annual health spending on dementia and Parkinson's

disease of up to \$6.9 billion per year ... that's a jump from \$2.4 billion per annum in the year 2000 to \$9.3 billion in 2030.

In terms of quality of life, dementia costs more years in the health span than any of the national health priority areas, which include asthma, cardiovascular disease, injury, cancer, diabetes, mental health and arthritis.

I'm told that if researchers found a way to delay the onset of Alzheimer's Disease by five years it would result in a 49 percent reduction in the number of people diagnosed by mid century.

Statistics such as these clearly strengthen the case for continuing research to explore ways to delay the onset of dementia.

I'm aware that scientific knowledge and understanding of dementia is advancing.

And there is a growing optimism that one day it may actually be possible to avoid, prevent, delay or more effectively treat the disease.

I think that it's important to acknowledge that while the provision of care and support for people with dementia spans a range of services, sectors and funding bodies, much of it is provided informally by families and carers.

It's vital that we recognise, support and value their considerable contribution to dementia.

Family members and carers face very real challenges in providing care and support for their loved one ... leading to feelings of isolation, frustration and depression.

Because of the physical and mental changes caused by dementia, carers can feel as though they are no longer valued by the person they are looking after.

I understand that research is also helping to develop new forms of support for the families and carers of people with depression.

In addition, carers can benefit from research simply through participation.

This is often a very useful and worthwhile experience ... even in studies that don't produce any direct health benefits for the participants.

It's been reported that participation in research can help carers deal with the feelings of helplessness and loss of control that often accompany a diagnosis of the disease in someone close to them.

Participants can feel as though they are contributing to the search for the cause, cure or care for the disease and can learn more about the situation that they are in.

Before I finish I'd like to acknowledge the significant effort that has gone into the organisation of this research seminar.

Alzheimer's Australia Tasmania is a leading authority on dementia in this State.

For a number of years the dedicated staff and volunteers of this organisation have been doing a great job of caring for Tasmanians living with dementia.

The Australian Association of Gerontology is also a sponsor of today's event. I understand that this association is the largest multidisciplinary professional association of people working in the field of ageing in Australia.

Members include health professionals, researchers, government sector staff and providers of aged care services, many of whom are present here today.

I'd like to thank you all for the help you provide to our elderly.

Finally, I'd like to congratulate the University of Tasmania for the significant gains it has made in the field of dementia research in recent years ... and I look forward to hearing more about this in a moment.

I believe that today's event is evidence that the University has really put Tasmania on the map in this significant and growing area of research and I wish everyone involved the very best in your future endeavours.

From the number and range of stakeholders I see gathered, I'm confident that this seminar will be a great success.

I'm sure it will pave the way for more valuable occasions like this one into the future.

It now gives me great pleasure to formally declare this Dementia Research Seminar open.

Thank you.
