National Dementia Strategy
A social work perspective

John Brennan
Special Interest Group on Ageing
The Irish Association of Social Workers
9th April 2013
Issues for person with dementia

• Dignity and respect – being treated as a person
  — Overcoming Ageism + Stigma (+ elder abuse)

• Communications: Being treated as if you weren’t there

• Cognitive Capacity: Impairment/loss of capacity

• Difficulty accessing formal services
  — Patchy, Inconsistent, Inequitable

• Autonomy vs Risk
  — Decision-making + maintaining some power & control

• Fear + trauma/ Loss + grief / Maintenance of hope

• Changing relationships + loss of role
Issues for family carer

• Lack of information + knowledge
  – Diagnosis, prognosis, processes, rights + entitlements

• Lack of caring skills + techniques

• Carer’s own strengths and resources

• Sense of burden, crisis + family tensions

• Carer may themselves suffer ill health
  • may compromise ability to care/visit
Issues for family carers

• Family/carers may have high guilt feelings

• Family do not wish to worry – drives attitudes

• Sometimes poor/abusive relationships

• Changing relationships + loss of role

• Difficulty accessing formal services

• Stress and burnout
A carer’s views

• ‘What is very difficult for the carer is the feeling that you are talking to somebody who you know and love that does not have a clue who you are + they are very aggressive – “How dare you tell me what to do!” She [her mother] came down last night + she handed him [her father] a bundle of clothes + she said “pack them now, I’m leaving” + he is not able to switch off + say “I’m dealing with a two year old” which is what I say to him – “Dad! It’s like a two year old, just take the clothes and put them in a bag”. No! he starts to argue with her + say “put those clothes back! What am I going to do with them” + she said something vulgar, + my mother is very ladylike, + has never said anything even remotely impolite in her life, so this really shocked my father.’
Role of Social Work

• To understand the situation of older person with dementia in the context of their individual stories

+ 

• To support them + their family carers emotionally + practically thru’ change + loss over time
  = seek out the person’s story
  = attention to social relationships and process
  = advocacy
    - challenge injustice + discrimination

+ 

• To promote older person’s human rights
  – Older people are citizens with rights
Social work responses

- Assessment, planning, co-ordinating, etc
- Crisis intervention/management
- Information + Education
- Emotional support/Counselling
- Advocacy
- Family work
- Practical supports – HCPs, NHSS, Housing, etc
Social Work Skills

- Building good working relationships
- Assessment
- Counselling/emotional support
- Communication
- Networking/Liaison
- Organisational/Planning
  - Care Planning
- Mediation + negotiation
- Advocacy: Case + Issue
National Dementia Strategy

• Focusing on Quality of Life + Human Rights
• Appropriately balancing the medical + the social
• Implementing policy to care at home
• Prioritising education, information + training
• Increasing number of multidisciplinary primary care teams  
  — Increasing number of community based social workers
• Providing dementia-specific facilities for Day Care + LTC
• Engaging with the NCPOP
• Promoting Research
• Underpinning all with the appropriate legislation
Challenges

• Developing perspective that is anti-ageist + non-discriminatory

• Involving service users

• Maintaining professional discretion + autonomy in face of increasing bureaucracy

• Communicating with those who have a dementia

• Developing good inter-professional work

• Developing efficient + seamless services
Working with ‘Risk’ in dementia care

• Managing ‘risk’ more complex

• Various interpretations of ‘risk’
  – Professionals = falling
  – Carers = loss of partnership role
  – Person with dementia = loss of identity, autonomy

• ‘don’t get me wrong, carers are the most important people... but you can have carers and keepers. The latter try + assume total responsibility...prematurely + there are many of them.’
  – (person with dementia)

• Different perceptions can lead to conflict between professionals and informal carers