

First National Conference on Dementia Care in Acute Hospitals held in UCC on January 31st, 2014

Over 170 delegates from a wide range of disciplines attended the first National Conference on Dementia Care in Acute Hospitals in University College Cork on Friday 31st January 2014. The conference, which was opened by Ms Kathleen Lynch, Minister for Disability, Older People, Equality & Mental Health, included speakers from a wide range of backgrounds, including Gerontology, Psychiatry of Old Age, Nursing, Social Work, General Practice and the HSE. This ensured that a broad spectrum of perspectives on the experience and issues of caring for older people with dementia during an acute hospital admission were presented throughout the day.

An expert panel discussion, chaired by Professor Des O'Neill, ensured that delegates could explore issues most pertinent to them and facilitated information sharing and discussion. Questions and answers throughout the day continued to generate discussion around each of the subjects presented.

Topics discussed on the day included community perspectives on acute hospital care, aspects of the National Dementia Strategy, the economic case for better dementia care in acute hospitals, and emerging data from the Dementia in Acute Cork Hospitals Study (ODCACS). Two breakout sessions in the afternoon gave delegates the choice to attend lectures focused on 'challenging behaviour and delirium' or 'towards better care'. These sessions included presentations on the acute hospital environment, the National Dementia Education Programme and perspectives on end of life and palliative care.

The conference also saw the official launch of the results of the first Irish National Audit of Dementia care in Acute Hospitals, which found that Ireland does not yet have standardised care for people with dementia in acute hospitals. The audit also showed differences in the access to dementia-relevant services between hospitals, with poor access to many diagnostic and support services. The results highlighted inadequate assessment of cognition, delirium, mood, and behavioural and psychological symptoms in people with dementia during their admission, and where assessed and discovered, issues were not highlighted on discharge. Media coverage of the report can be found at https://storify.com/UCC_Ireland/national-dementia-audit-in-acute-hospitals-shows

Dr. Kevin Stewart shared learning from the UK experience of conducting national audits, including the second round of the National Dementia Audit. This presentation gave insight into the challenges of translating research and audit findings into practical change and improvement in service delivery and structure.

Overall the day was a great success and provided a rich learning experience for all those attending. The argument for developing appropriate and responsive dementia care in all acute hospitals in Ireland was clearly and eloquently presented, along with a number of practical steps necessary to achieving this goal.