

## An early dementia diagnosis is important

**EARLY DEMENTIA** diagnosis provides people with a golden opportunity to improve quality of life for people with dementia. Society certainly is talking more about dementia. We hear about it on the news with research breakthroughs, films and books such as *The Notebook* and *Still Alice*.

It is great to see growing awareness and less stigma attached to dementia, and yet we still find many people are undiagnosed or diagnosed late in the illness.

The most commonly known signs of early dementia are memory loss, getting lost, difficulty finding the right words, trouble completing tasks and poor judgement. Sometimes people don't get a diagnosis because of the perception that there is no cure, so people think 'why

distress everyone with a dementia diagnosis?'

A diagnosis is important because some of these same symptoms may occur in conditions that are not dementia and that are treatable. For example, depression, nutritional deficiencies, or alcohol or drug abuse can generate similar symptoms. An examination can mean some of these conditions are excluded or treated.

A diagnosis is also important because it means people with dementia and their families can be offered appropriate support along the dementia journey. Discussion and planning can occur early while the individual is able to clearly articulate their preferences for housing, care and end of life.

These discussions empower the person with dementia and



Associate Professor Christine Stirling, vice-president of AAG

give them some control over their future. With an early diagnosis, life story work can enable a focus on appropriate activities and environment, and this is particularly important for people who have no carer to help interpret behaviours later in the illness.

With a diagnosis,

individuals can benefit from re-enablement programs that help them to retain or relearn skills that may be impacted by dementia.

The more we learn about caring for people with dementia, the more people can benefit from an early diagnosis. If you are in a position to facilitate a diagnosis, I recommend you take action.

How can you help someone gain a diagnosis? Referral to a GP, specialist or specialist nurse practitioner will mean that the older person can be assessed.

Once diagnosed, access to appropriate services will help with planning and managing the dementia illness to ensure the best quality of life possible for the individual. ■



## Aged care must value and maintain community approval

**ENSURING COMMUNITY** confidence in the aged care system is critical to maintaining our industry's social license to operate. Recently we have seen other industry sectors face the challenges of maintaining a social license.

Presently, Australia's gas companies are at risk of losing their social license with a threat from the Government to intervene should they fail to develop a strategy to the impending domestic supply crisis.

A year ago, Australia's banks faced a similar threat to their social license after allegations surfaced about unethical behaviour by Commonwealth Bank of Australia's insurance arm, and financial advice scandals within the Commonwealth, ANZ and NAB.

There is no one formula for the aged care sector to maintain its social license. However, at its heart the concept is all about maintaining good relationships. That is, the human connections



Sean Rooney, CEO of LASA

between caregivers and care recipients and their families are fundamental to delivering quality care, support and services, which in turn underpin community confidence and the industry's social license to operate.

In this context there are three hallmarks of successful relationships – respect, transparency and consistency.

One of the principles of maintaining a social license is to respect the interests of your stakeholders.

This principle directs the

activities an organisation should take in identifying its stakeholders, evaluating their capacity to engage with and influence the organisation, considering their views and taking into account the relationship between their views and society's broader expectations.

Transparency in relationships is underpinned by respect and fosters resilience. Setting and communicating expectations and obligations between providers and consumers is the starting point for transparency. Open, ongoing and honest communication and information sharing are the keys to building trust and confidence in what we do.

The aged care industry is judged every day against stringent professional and ethical standards. Consistently meeting, and at times often exceeding, these standards builds and maintains the confidence of consumers and the wider community.

Furthermore, ensuring compliance with agreed government, industry and

professional discipline accreditation schemes is non-negotiable in maintaining professional and sustainable business operations.

The best measure of future behaviour is past performance. Therefore, consistently meeting and exceeding both consumer expectations and accreditation obligations is fundamental to maintaining a social license.

If our industry does not actively value and manage this, the results can be damaging and far-reaching. A loss of confidence and reputation can result in lost revenues, increased regulatory and compliance requirements, higher financial costs and imposts, increased difficulties in hiring a skilled workforce, costly delays to business operations, downturn in investor and stakeholder confidence, and ultimately the potential prospect of business closures.

As an industry, it is in our collective interest to ensure that we value and maintain our social license to operate. ■