Media Representation of Dementia

Introduction

What if someone wakes up and everything seems unknown to him or her? How would the person feel if the family members and friends sit around but he or she could not recognise them or remember their name? The answer to both question is “Lost”, that is how that person would feel. And that is all about “dementia”, keep forgetting everything you know, everything that ever meant anything to you, everything you need to focus on or keep track of. Media, just like in any other important issues, plays here a very crucial role as they can create mass awareness about this problem.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a type of mental illness that comes with symptoms such as loss of memory, changes in personality, thinking difficulties and struggle of solving problems and language (Cronin et al, 1993). These symptoms or problems can be considered as small problems but for the affected people these problems make their daily life harder. Severity of this illness may often lead to change in behaviour or mood (Clarke, 2001). Dementia can happen due to a disorder in the mental process, a disease in the human brain or an injury (MacGill, 2017).

Usually, people experience this illness after the age 65. People affected by dementia may lose interest in their general activities and control on their emotions and sometimes, socialising becomes challenging for them (Duffy , et al. 1994). In addition, they cannot plan and organise their daily activities and therefore become dependent on others. Furthermore, dementia affected person may often see things that are not happening which is called hallucinations

Media representation of dementia

Media sometimes represent the people who are living with dementia with the purpose of achieving their business objectives (Alzheimer’s Society, 2015). There has been an increase of the number of research in dementia that has attracted the interest of older people, health professionals and friends and relatives of people with dementia (PWD). They can read the research report and articles on the newspapers or health related magazines (Alzheimer’s Society, 2015). The English writer Iris Murdoch and Richard Taylor are two of those who wrote the book ‘Alzheimer’s, From the Inside Out’ from their personal experience (Alzheimer’s Society, 2015).

There is a big audience of the articles or news related to dementia. The newspapers try to reach their target audience and attempt to make ‘Dementia’ topic popular to achieve their business goals which seems plausible. In recent times, different media such as newspaper, TV media and movies started to bring dementia into the limelight.

The New York Times once reported that cost of care of dementia is even more than cancer and heart disease (Kolata, 2015). In the past the media used to use negative terminologies to coin dementia such as time bomb. The Independent once claimed that this Time Bomb (dementia) would cost English business £3b by the year 2030 (Cooper, 2014).

In more recent times, newspapers started to publish news that is more positive. The Telegraph has recently reported that dementia can be controlled just like HIV (Knapton, 2018). The number of reports on dementia also has increased rapidly in the recent times. For example, The Telegraph has published 30 reports on different issues related to dementia since February 2018 (Telegraph, 2018).

Dementia is being portrayed more frequently on the television and movies now ever than before. Dementia seems to be a popular topic since it is portrayed on soaps like Emmerdale to movies like Still Alice. However, the question is whether these portrayals match with the real life experience of person who suffering from this illness? It is undeniable that TV and movies can contact a bigger number of individuals than scientific journals and documentaries particularly, Hollywood movies with enormous names such as Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin.

A recent advertisement by Dementia UK, created by Arthur London, shown that with help of an Admiral Nurse it is possible for people to get together again with one they lost in dementia. In this case, Dementia UK has used its website and different video sharing platform such as YouTube, Vimeo to spread this advertisement and the message it carries (Together Again, 2018). Another advertisement made by Alzheimer’s Society, titled “Time to Forget” inspires people to forget the differences that keep

Media Impact and influence on public perception

Media has always been one of the most important catalysts in different important issues. People in this media dominated world get access to everything through media. So their perspective on those issues highly dependent on the media representation. The representation of dementia in the media could have an adverse impact on the people living with the illness.

According to the “Direct Effects Model” of media effects theories, these types of negative phrasing and terminologies are bound to create fear and anxiety among the people (Minnesota, 2011). This type of representation might drive people to think that the dementia attacked people are burden to the family, society and the country.

There is evidence that not only direct effects theory is effective in the impact of media representation on dementia (Minnesota, 2011). Some reports in newspaper shows how much people care about their loved ones lost in dementia. For example, Robyn Hollingworth, a liberty buyer gave up her career in fashion just to be with her father, an Alzheimer’s patient. So, people do make their own decision sometimes with motivations from their family, friends and other loved ones (Minnesota, 2011).

There is another media effects theory present and that is agenda setting theory. According to agenda setting theory what media talks much about becomes the most discussed and acclaimed. Media determines what issues public would be discussing about (Minnesota, 2011).

At present different media is highlight dementia like never before. And more importantly media is focusing on positive aspects such as creating awareness about this problem, letting people know about the actions that might help taming this problem and inspiring people to care. So people are getting more and more hopeful that soon there would be some specific treatment to dementia through the ongoing researches.

Complexity of Policy and legislation

As the number of dementia affected people is increasing every year worldwide it is becoming a big worry for the government. Countries across the world have taken it as a challenge and taking various steps to prevent it along with its diagnosis and intervention (Clarke, 2006; Kirkman, 2006). The government of UK has already identified this issue that negative media representation has an adverse impact on dementia affected people and peoples’ attitude towards them. That is why the government has formulated Mental Capacity Act (NHS, 2018). This act is aimed at ensuring that when a decision on behalf of a person who is not able to make that decision on his/her own, it is made to serve that person’s best interest. The act also demands that the decision maker/carer must assess all the available options to ensure that the decision is least restrictive alternative (NHS, 2018).

Government agencies along with mental health organisations in the UK work and campaign together to reduce the effect of dementia and increase support for the affected people. For example, in Dementia Discovery Fund, the government of UK collaborated with Alzheimer’s Research UK and major pharmaceuticals companies to boost up research on dementia and Alzheimer’s (UK, 2016). Another example could be the Join Dementia Research scheme in which the National Institute for Health Research in partnership with Alzheimer Scotland, Alzheimer’s Research UK and Alzheimer’s Society try and include more and more dementia patient in research and reducing the risk of dementia while improving the care for them at the same time (Alzhemer’s Research UK, 2016).

It has been identified that about 25% hospital beds are occupied by dementia affected people. To improve this situation, government has announced its plans in 2015 known as Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia (Govt.UK, 2015; Alzheimer’s Society, 2015) that includes:

Instructing all the hospitals in England to be friendlier with people with dementia. Most of the hospitals in England now give reward to the staff that has behaved in the nicest way with dementia patients.
Investing £54 million in financing for healing facility dementia hazard evaluations to the nature of dementia care
Instructing trusts to select a senior clinical lead for dementia whose responsibility will be to ensure staff are well trained to deal with dementia affected people.
asking care homes and administrations to join to the Dementia Care and Support Compact, which sets out new models for the care of dementia
Working together with care homes and home care provider companies to increase support for improved diagnosis and post diagnosis.
supporting the care homes and wards with £50 million of financing that deal with individuals with dementia
providing dementia preparing assets for wellbeing and care specialists - more than 377,886 NHS staff have effectively gotten Tier 1 (establishment level) dementia preparing and more than 100,000 social care labourers have officially gotten some type of dementia mindfulness preparing
Providing £400 million to help finance breaks for carers and through the Care Act 2014 have acquainted huge changes with better bolster carers (counting carers of individuals with dementia), giving them a privilege to have their necessities

Conclusion

Dementia has been identified as number one health threat in UK. Just like many opther countries it is the most critical and costly health issue UK government is dealing with right now. In this situation, media representation of dementia is so much important as it shapes the perceptions of the people about this health issue. People get most of their information about dementia from different media and it is their responsibility to give the people a message that even dementia can be beaten. While a negative portrayal of this issue can drive people away from the affected one, positive news can get people to care and who knows, we might even be able to lessen this threat without expense of big bucks.

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