

New project focuses on dementia in farming and rural communities

February 16 2016, by Andrew Gould



Dementia is a growing health problem, with an anticipated increase in the number of cases of 156 per cent between now and 2051, according

to statistics from the Alzheimer's Society.

This equates to two million people, and the burden will fall on rural areas where there are significantly higher proportions of elderly people.

The burden will impact farming businesses, communities and the rural economy, yet little is known about how this impact will manifest itself and what kind of specialist care networks will need to be in place to tackle it.

"Farming, Dementia and Networks of Care" is the first project of its kind to focus specifically on farming communities and dementia, and its results will be useful for farming communities, healthcare and service providers, and academics researching the condition.

Funded by the Seale Hayne Educational Trust, the project will be carried out by Dr Richard Yarwood and Dr Claire Kelly from the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences. They will be guided by a steering group including Joanne Jones from the Farming Community Network and chaired by Ian Sherriff, Academic Partnership Lead for Dementia at Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry.

The project, which will begin as a pilot in Devon, will investigate how farmers, their families and carers cope when they are affected by dementia. There are three main objectives – to consider the impact of dementia on farming businesses; to evaluate how dementia affects farming families and communities, and; to consider how voluntary and state agencies can support farming families with dementia.

Dr Yarwood commented:

"This project is a starting point and we hope that it will be useful to care

agencies and provide support for farming families affected by dementia. We will be making our key findings public and we hope in turn that this will lead to a wider understanding of dementia in rural places. We plan to build on this small-scale project to develop applications for future research into the care of those with dementia in the countryside."

Ian Sherriff, who is also a member of the Prime Minister's Task and Finish Group on Rural Dementia, added:

"As someone who is totally committed to helping society tackle the many challenges that people with dementia and their carers face daily, I am really excited about the news that Plymouth University has been awarded research funding to support Dr Richard Yarwood and Dr Claire Kelly research the issues and challenges that people with dementia and their carers face in the farming community."

He continued:

"There is widespread recognition at the highest level of government about the present and potential future impacts of dementia. The search for ways to enhance the quality of life for those affected is a constant and complex one. This innovative research will provide a body of knowledge that has the potential to open up new ways that the [farming community](#) can understand and support people with dementia and their carers, in rural communities."

The research team are interested in talking to farmers who have a family member suffering from [dementia](#). Please contact Dr Yarwood (r.yarwood@plymouth.ac.uk), Dr Kelly (claire.kelly@plymouth.ac.uk) or Ian Sherriff (ian.sherriff@plymouth.ac.uk) for more information.

Provided by University of Plymouth

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