

The growing scale of dementia in the UK

September 21 2017, by Al McCartney

To mark World Alzheimer's Day Imperial's head of brain sciences describes some of the research being done at the College into the condition.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of [dementia](#), a collection of symptoms associated with a decline in brain function, including memory loss, impaired judgment, language and becoming generally less 'sharp' mentally.

World Alzheimer's Day is an annual opportunity for organisations to raise awareness of the condition and the growing number of people affected by it.

More than 225,000 people are expected to be diagnosed with some form of dementia in the UK this year alone, and the number is set to grow with the UK's ageing population.

Alzheimer's is thought to account for 62 per cent of dementia diagnoses, and is a progressive condition chiefly affecting older adults over 80. However, the symptoms can also arise in those under 80, with cases of early onset affecting working age adults, chipping away at memory and cognition.

Professor Paul Matthews, Edmond and Lily Safra Chair and Head of Brain Sciences at Imperial College London explains that Alzheimer's disease involves the "triggering of abnormal protein production in the brain".

Two of these proteins, beta-amyloid and tau, form the characteristic clumps and tangles seen in the brains of patients with Alzheimer's thought to damage the neurons, causing the nerve cells to progressively decline and leading to changes in cognition and behaviour.

A growing problem

Commenting on the current scale of the problem, Professor Matthews said: "Dementia is a growing and major problem in the United Kingdom, as it is in all developed nations.

"Currently, there are about 900,000 people with one form of dementia or another, and roughly one in 14 people over the age of 65 will develop dementia.

"Because our population is ageing over time, the number of people in the UK with dementia will grow. By 2025, there could be as many as two million people."

Imperial is one of a number of institutions in the UK pooling expertise as part of the Dementia Research Institute (DRI), a network of academic centres of excellence across the UK working towards common research goals to better understand dementia.

Earlier this year, the College was chosen as one of several satellite centres for the UK DRI, to harness the expertise from multiple fields and to explore the factors contributing to dementia.

Imperial's role in dementia research

Funded by the Medical Research Council, Alzheimer's Society and Alzheimer's Research UK, the UK DRI is based at University College London, with satellite centres in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Cambridge and

London – including Imperial College London and Kings College London.

Professor Matthews, Associate Director of the UK DRI, said: "Imperial College has been asked to play a key role in the UK DRI. All of the centres are working together towards common broad scientific objectives.

"But Imperial will take the lead in developing novel neuro-technologies, exploring the way the metabolome and microbiome – the many bugs in our gut – work to modulate the brain and the brain's immune system, and understand the role that sleep plays both in controlling inflammation in the [brain](#), and the abnormal proteins associated with Alzheimer's Disease."

Provided by Imperial College London

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