

Speech: World Alzheimer's Day: could we create a world without dementia?

Could we create a world without dementia in the near future?

This is the question that for years no one has dared to ask. We assumed – wrongly – that dementia was just part of the ageing process instead of the disease of the brain it actually is. But 4 years ago that changed. The UK hosted the first ever G8 dementia summit, which set the explicit ambition to find a cure or disease-modifying therapy for dementia by 2025.

Since then, governments have formally united in the fight against dementia, and adopted the first Global Action Plan on Dementia, during the World Health Assembly in May 2017.

In the UK we have done much to improve diagnosis rates, from one of the lowest to one of the highest in Europe. This matters because an early diagnosis can support patients to make lifestyle changes that slow the progress of the disease – and also help families make adjustments to make their dementia journey easier.

Public attitudes – and specifically the stigma around dementia – are also changing. We now have over 2 million Dementia Friends, and the first dementia-friendly communities – both of them signalling a sea-change in the compassion with which we approach the disease.

And the establishment of the UK Dementia Research Institute earlier this year will provide a new focal point for research across care, prevention and technology as well as biomedical science.

We can't do this alone. Our partnership with Japan, who pioneered Dementia Friends and like us faces many challenges with an ageing population, shows how valuable cross-border collaboration is when it comes to answering one of the biggest global health challenges of our times. We have been able to ensure a continued focus on dementia throughout Japan's presidency of the G7, with learning exchanges between both nations, a successful global symposium on Building A Dementia Friendly World, and the establishment of Global Dementia Friends Ambassadors Carey Mulligan and Yuichiro Miura.

Message from Japan's Dementia Supporters Ambassador, Mr Yuichiro Miura:

[Yuichiro Miura.](#)

But partnership needs to be not just between governments but with civil society and voluntary organisations as well. So we strongly support the brilliant work done by the Alzheimer's Society, Alzheimer's Research UK and other dementia-focused charities in the UK. And during the 2014 World Health Assembly, I was pleased to launch the Global Alzheimer's and Dementia Action Alliance, encouraging international NGOs to join global action against this condition.

In the end, though, our approach to dementia is quite simply a litmus test of how compassionate a society we want to be. Living with dementia can be horrific for the individual and their family – but it doesn't have to be. Social interaction – the love and support of family and friends – is one of the best possible ways to slow progression. We may not yet be able to cure the disease but we can all play a part in tackling the symptoms.