WORLD DEMENTIA COUNCIL SUMMIT

MSH SPEECH

25TH MARCH 2025

Speech

Hello everybody.

I’d like to thank the World Dementia Council for inviting me to close this important Summit.

And I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have travelled from across the world to be here today - from Australia, Argentina, Sweden, the USA and Korea.

On behalf of the British Government, I welcome you all to our country and thank you for putting the UK at the heart of the global conversations on tackling dementia.

Dementia is a challenge that affects us all, no matter where we come from. It is a shared challenge, a shared threat, and one we must confront together.

Today, you've heard from some brilliant scientists, innovators, and policy experts from across the world. Their insights remind us that collaboration is key in the fight against dementia.

I am a politician, not a scientist, and I won't seek to match your expertise. But I have seen the power of politics to improve systems and improve people's lives.

Our Common Threat

The facts about dementia are clear, and their impact is undeniable:

- Every three seconds, someone in the world develops dementia.
- In 2020, 55 million people were living with it.
- That number will nearly double every 20 years—reaching 78 million by 2030 and 139 million by 2050.

And much of this rise will be in developing countries.

Right now, 60% of people with dementia live in low- and middle-income nations. By 2050, that will climb to 71%.

Dementia is not just a health issue. It's a global challenge—one we must tackle together.

In the UK, the number of people with dementia is expected to rise to 1.4 million by 2040.

Dementia becomes more common with age –40% of people with dementia are over the age of 85.

Many of you have worked with or know someone affected by dementia.

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Each person, along with their loved ones and caregivers, has a unique journey. Their heartbreaking experiences remind us why this fight matters.

- A plumber forgetting his tools.
- An artist who can no longer remember the brushstrokes that were once second nature.
- A grandmother who can’t recognise her grandchildren.

It takes great courage to tell these stories, and I want to thank everyone who has shared their personal experiences today.

<u>This year’s theme – Disruption</u>

Fourteen years ago, I would have said our National Health Service was a model for the world to emulate.

But our NHS has not kept up with the reforms needed to face the rising threat of dementia in the 21st century, with confidence. If our NHS is to survive, we need to embrace disruption.

Those who follow UK politics know the past few weeks have brought disruption, change, and bold ideas for the health service.

We welcome disruption because things cannot go on as they have before. And that's why I welcome this year's themes of disruption and accelerating change.

Our ambition is to shift the focus of our NHS from hospital to community, analogue to digital and sickness to prevention.

And our 10-Year Health Plan will set a new standard of joined-up care for people living with a combination of complex health and care needs.

Working with the Rest of the World

Now, I am from the British Labour movement. We're a party that prides ourselves on our internationalism.

And in our manifesto, we committed to put Britain at the forefront of transforming treatment for dementia.

But putting Britain at the forefront does not mean shutting ourselves off from the rest of the world – far from it.

While we do have a vibrant life sciences sector, we don't want to develop our innovations alone – even if that were possible.

We want the UK to learn from others and share our discoveries internationally too.

I want to see a world where every person with dementia from Papa New-Guinea to Peru receives high-quality,

compassionate care for dementia – from diagnosis through to the end of their lives.

That's why we're forging ties with our friends globally, to collaborate on research funding opportunities, helping to grow collaboration internationally.

We're engaging with the European Union to join the Horizon Europe Brain Health partnership.

World leading research

Here in the UK, we're making great strides in dementia research. We are building a strong network of academics, health and social care professionals and most and professionals in health and social care, and most importantly people living with dementia and their families and carers.

Our research and the structures we are putting in place will have a global benefit. Providing the evidence we need to better understand the causes of dementia, how we can delay onset, how we can treat and care for people impacted throughout their journeys and also support those people who care for them.

We are achieving this through investment from the Department of Health and Social Care via our National Institute for Health and Care Research in the UK Dementia Research Institute, and other major government initiatives that engage the whole UK government.

This Government has committed £120 million of funding to the Dame Barbara Windsor Dementia Goals Programme, which aims to speed up the development of new treatments for dementia and neurodegenerative conditions – by accelerating innovations in biomarkers, clinical trials and implementation.

Last year, there were 164 trials assessing 127 drugs for Alzheimer's Disease alone.

This government is investing almost £50m in the Dementia Trials Network, which will deliver a coordinated network of early phase dementia clinical trial sites to support the identification of effective treatments of dementia.

Led by Professor Cath Mummery, who is leading the world's first gene silencing trial for dementia, the Dementia Trials

Network will establish the UK as the go to place for early phase trials.

The views and experiences of patients will be central to this programme of work.

But it’s not just enough to invest in hard science – we’re also investing in research that will improve the lives of people living with dementia, and their carers.

Just this weekend we announced almost £7 million of investment in research networks that will develop tools and technologies to enable people to live independently with dementia.

For example, one network will work with local dementia services and charities to help set up local technology hubs in the Northeast of our country, to reach people in rural and remote areas.

Here, they can get advice and recommendations about technology, borrow devices to try at home and add their voice

to discussions about how technology could help them to live independently.

I know that we heard from the Alzheimer's Society earlier today, and I want to thank them and others who help us drive progress on dementia.

And most importantly, to those people who take part in research, without you, we will not make the breakthroughs that we so urgently need.

WRAPPING UP

I want to end with a story about one such person.

A very special lady called Nellie Suffolk.

Nellie was born in Zambia, in 1941.

Her father was a headmaster, and she was lucky enough to go to school at a time when only 1% of the population finished their primary education.

She met her husband, a British man called John, while teaching in a secondary school in Copperbelt Province, and over the years she:

- became a home economics teacher in Botswana and Zimbabwe,
- trained teachers in Papua New Guinea and
- went on to teach psychology at the University of Brunei.

Quite the globetrotter!

But in 2017, Nellie was diagnosed with dementia, and characteristically, she wanted to use her experience to help others.

She said, “I get involved with research because I like helping people.”

But Nellie doesn’t just help with research, she’s still a pillar of her community.

And motivated by her strong Christian faith, she is part of an international volunteering organisation called “the Lions” dedicated to improving communities all over the world.

She said she was a member of the lions because she knows what it’s liketo live in poverty, to have nothing and to be ignored by other people.

Music is also important to Nellie, and she attends a group called “Singing for the Brain” run by the Alzheimer’s Society.

This group is helping people affected by dementia improve their wellbeing, through the power of music.

Nellie now lives in Bristol – a city that I am proud to represent.

And I think her story teaches us three things:

First, that we have more in common, than what divides us.

Second, that we have so much to learn from one another.

And third, that a lifetime of service, is a lifetime well spent.

Thank you.