

When I first became involved in the issue of dementia it was focused around the needs of the sufferer, in particular whether they were being properly catered for in our healthcare services. I heard sad stories of patients with dementia being left un-supervised in wards allowing confused and vulnerable older people to walk off the ward and invariably get lost.

Since then my interest has evolved beyond the victim of this awful condition to the needs of their carers. Over the course of the last 3 years I have met many husbands, wives and children who provide primary care for their loved one. Not only does this mean becoming entirely responsible for dealing with the complexities of care pathways but also physical and emotional support during incredibly difficult times.

The one they knew and love sometimes becomes incapable of basic human interaction and my heart breaks for those who deal with this alone. Wives, who've never had to deal with the finances of the house suddenly find themselves in charge while male carers end up changing soiled clothes and washing private parts that they perhaps never even did for their children during a time when it was traditionally the mother's role.

Many organisations help support carers but this week I announced my support for the Dementia Action Alliance 'Carers' Call to Action'. Leading charities, public bodies and private providers are coming together to issue a call to transform the lives of families and friends caring for people with dementia. By working together they aim to transform the lives of 550,000 family carers of people with dementia in England today.

Family carers save the wider economy money and yet we fail to support them as we should. I hope many more will answer the Call to Action and help those who have to cope with not only losing the person they once knew but their own lives as they knew it to support them.

More information is available at www.dementiaaction.org.uk