

FOREWORD

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Reading the manuscript of this book prompted me to reflect on where we are with dementia. We have come a very long way and very quickly. In less than a decade dementia has gone from being at the very bottom of the pile in terms of health priority to the very top. It is not only on the agenda, but at the top of the agenda, for countries across the world that have developed National Dementia Strategies, from Mexico to South Korea, and from Qatar to Uruguay. Equally, international organisations from the World Health Organization to the G7 have moved dementia from out of the shadows of inactivity into the light of action.

From modest beginnings, fuelled by the experiences of people with dementia and the family members that support them, framed by the sharp and effective advocacy of the voluntary sector Alzheimer's societies and associations worldwide, and informed by research and clinical practice in health and social care, we have crafted a narrative that has caught the imagination of the world. Like all good stories it has developed its own life. It is not now owned by those that first articulated it, it is now part of common discourse, common understanding and common sense.

Simply stated, the story is that dementia is the paramount unsolved health and social care challenge for the 21st century. It is already so common that almost every family is affected and that its cost to society is greater than that of heart disease and cancer combined. In the next generation we know that the numbers will double and the costs will at least triple. We know that there is an immense amount that can already be done to enable people to live well with dementia, but that these opportunities to prevent harms, costs and crises are more often than not missed. The narrative we have is at the point of call for action, of people seeing that dementia is everybody's business and buckling down to grow, develop and deliver the solutions needed. The story has the virtue of being true and it is not over.

It is brilliant and astonishing that we have come so far, so fast. But such rapid progress has consequences. Other health priorities have been built on decades of research and experience, which means that the arguments for assessments and interventions made are strong and well rooted. It means that services are well

founded and generally available. In dementia we have not got the deep evidential roots that those working on other conditions, such as heart disease and cancer, have built carefully over the past 50 years. This is understandable when the stakes are so high, the needs are so great and the opportunity is open. However, what this means is that there remain important gaps in the evidence base for the provision of care and services in dementia. For example, we do not have definitive models of how and by whom diagnostic services should be provided and we do not have accepted models and standards for post-diagnostic care. We do not have consensus about what can and should be done in primary care, in secondary care, in social care and by the families and the voluntary sector. Mao Zedong stated, 'The policy of letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend is designed to promote the flourishing of the arts and the progress of science.' In the provision of services for people with dementia we are at the stage of 'a hundred flowers' blooming with as many models of care as there are Clinical Commissioning Groups. While some of the flowers may be wonderful, some are likely to be frankly poisonous and we do not know which is which at the moment. We need to identify where we have needs for more information and secure the data. We need to use those insights to move rapidly to consolidate our service models so that we can generate a clear and simple promise for people with dementia and their families that details what they can expect from services and what they will receive.

This is a complex and difficult journey and Dr Rahman's book is like having an informed, interested, intelligent and profoundly humane friend by your side on the journey through. This book is a friend who is encyclopaedic in knowledge and who is not afraid to have opinions and to express them. We are part-way along the journey; we have come a long way but we have far to go. This book helps us reflect on where we are and the road we have travelled, all the better to plan and travel the road ahead.

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