



CASH FOR DIAGNOSIS

GPs will be paid £150 for each patient they diagnose dementia to cut demand on memory clinics

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BY SHAUN WOOLLER 6th January 2017, 5:57 pm

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FAMILY doctors will be paid £150 for each patient they diagnose and treat for dementia in a bid to cut queues at memory clinics.

The controversial “cash for diagnosis” scheme will be introduced at some practices in the West Midlands this month. The doctors will also be paid £50 if they refer patients to another GP when they are too busy to complete the process themselves.

GPs are currently responsible for referring patients to a dedicated memory clinic, where they are assessed and diagnosed by specialists.

But many assessment centres have been overwhelmed as a result of a government drive to identify more victims of the degenerative brain disease.

NHS Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group said the new incentive scheme will see GPs diagnosing and initiating the treatment for the “less complicated” cases only.

A similar national project was scrapped shortly after launch when critics branded it “unethical”, time consuming, and pointless – because there is no cure.

Dudley CCG proposed the measure after finding patients currently wait an average of 13 weeks to be seen by the local memory clinic.

A spokesman said they hope the scheme will “take the pressure off the dementia assessment service so that patients with milder dementia or abnormal presentations can be assessed by specialists much sooner”.

Around 850,000 people are living with dementia in the UK but this far exceeds those with a formal diagnosis.

Health secretary Jeremy Hunt has pledged to speed up the process and made it a priority for the NHS. Only 42 per cent of cases were formally diagnosed in 2012, rising to 62 per cent in 2015. Ministers want to see it rise to 72 per cent this year.

Diagnoses of dementia increased by a fifth during the national scheme in 2014/15, where the government paid GPs £55 for each patient identified.

But clinics often became clogged up with patients that suffered from only mild dementia or did not have it at all – resulting in delays for the more serious cases.