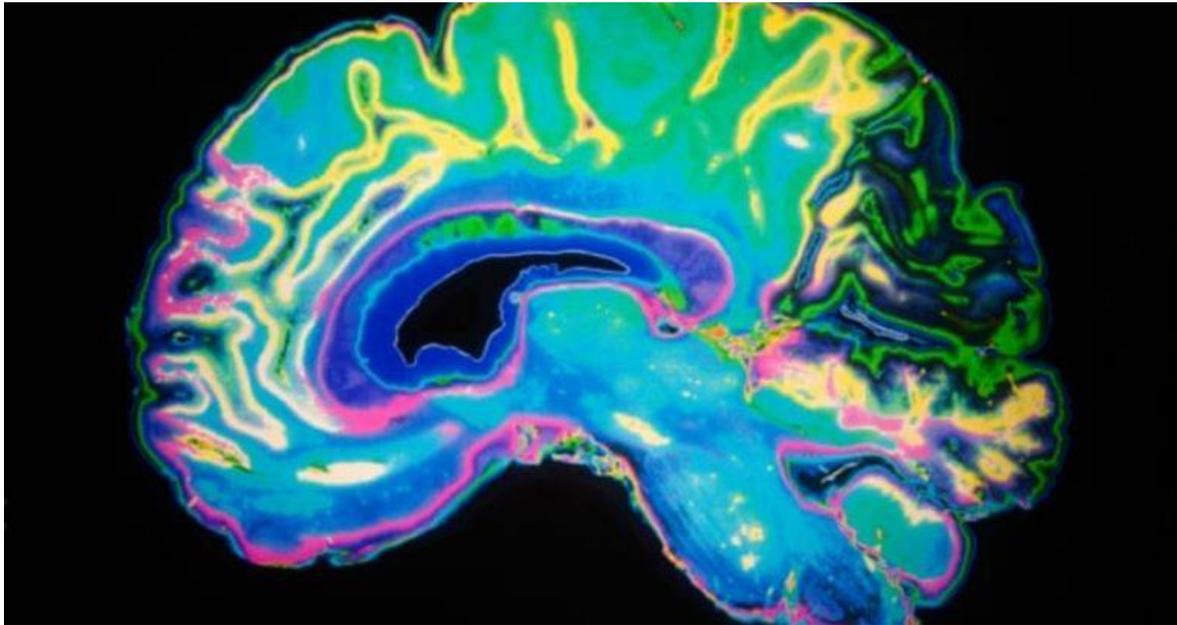


Dementia



Dementia poses a threat to global health on the same scale as HIV and Aids, the Dutch government has said, warning that the number of people with the condition will not be far off the population of Germany by 2030.

In a speech to the World Dementia Council summit in Japan on Friday, Hugo de Jonge, the Dutch health minister, said dementia was underfunded, misunderstood and overlooked, as HIV and Aids were in their early days.

“Only when it became clear how quickly the epidemic of HIV/Aids was taking hold ... taking millions of lives around the globe, did a global awareness emerge,” De Jonge said. “A huge sense of urgency arose ... and around 15 years after the epidemic first took hold, an effective treatment had been found.

“Today, we are on the verge of another epidemic; not a disease that attacks our immune systems, but our brain, our memory, our personality, ourselves. Like HIV/Aids in its early days, dementia is a globally underfunded area of medicine.”

He pointed out that if all people believed to have dementia lived in one country, it would be roughly the size of Spain, and cited predictions that by 2030, this hypothetical nation would contain nearly 75 million people. “By then, it should become a member of the G7,” De Jonge said.

“The costs of dementia care by that time are estimated at a staggering \$2tn (£1.6tn). No one should be in any doubt: dementia is one of the biggest medical and social challenges we’ll face in the years ahead. In some countries, it already is the main cause of death.”

The challenge is particularly relevant in the Netherlands, which has an ageing population of just over 17 million people, 280,000 of whom have some form of neurological impairment such as dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

Prof Philip Scheltens, the director of the Alzheimer Centre at UMC teaching hospital in Amsterdam, has lobbied the Dutch government for serious investment in research.

“The comparison with Aids is often made,” he said. “The urgency is unbelievably huge, as it was at the time, although it might be better to compare it with cancer. There is still no medicine and we need to go back to the drawing board to understand dementia. The worldwide budget must go up.”

The Netherlands will also call for other countries at the G20 health ministers’ meeting this weekend in Okayama, Japan, to participate in a joint research programme. In July next year, Amsterdam will host a strategy summit for 6,000 researchers.

Lenny Shallcross, the executive director of the World Dementia Council, who was at the Japan summit, said: “Dementia is the biggest health challenge of the 21st century.”

Hilary Evans, the chief executive of Alzheimer’s Research UK, said the Aids comparison was appropriate.

“One in three people born today will develop this devastating condition in their lifetime, unless we find new ways to prevent and treat the diseases,” she said.

“We’ve seen what can successfully be achieved in other areas of health by a movement of people coming together to call for change, tackle stigma and drive radical and sustained increases in research funding.

“Thanks to this research investment, today HIV is no longer a terminal condition in many countries, and research has changed so many lives. We want to see the same for dementia and the 50 million people worldwide affected by the condition.”

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/18/dementia-similar-threat-global-health-hiv-aids-world-summit>