

Behavioural and psychological symptoms of people living with undiagnosed dementia: findings from the CFAS Wales study

Which symptoms do people associate with dementia?

What makes people more or less likely to see a doctor about it?

Signs of dementia usually start to show long before a doctor diagnoses it. Doctors call these signs 'symptoms of dementia'. Many people with dementia do not know they have it. Doctors want to be able to diagnose people sooner.

Knowing you have dementia sooner has many benefits. You can access health and support services more quickly. These services may help in improving quality of life for both the person with dementia and their families. Knowing you have dementia can also help with planning for the future.

We wanted to understand which things made a difference to whether people thought they had dementia. We also wanted to know whether other things like your age or where you live made a difference to whether you would seek a diagnosis.

We spoke to a group of people over the age of 65 living in Wales. This group of people all had symptoms of dementia according to the answers they gave. However, only some had a dementia diagnosis.

We then looked to see which of these people had a dementia diagnosis recorded in their medical notes. We compared the people who had a dementia diagnosis with those who didn't have a diagnosis. We looked for differences in common symptoms, such as seeing/hearing things that aren't there or feeling sad. We also looked for differences in age, sex, education, who they lived with, whether they were married and how prosperous the area they lived in was.

We found two groups of people were less likely to have a dementia diagnosis. These were people who were more educated and people who lived in less prosperous areas.

In terms of symptoms, we found that people who were more forgetful or had more difficulty understanding things were more likely to have a dementia diagnosis. However, people who had low mood or sleep problems were less likely to know about their condition.

Dementia can lead you to lack interest in things or feel less motivated. In health research we call this apathy. Everyone in the group had some apathy, but the people who had a dementia diagnosis had a lot of apathy.

Our findings suggest that doctors should be aware of sleep problems, depression and apathy as possible early signs of dementia. This could lead to earlier diagnosis and people getting the help they need.

This is a summary of a [research article](#) which appeared in the **BMC Geriatrics** in May 2022.