

STUDYING DECLINE IN DEMENTIA FIGURES

RESEARCHERS from Bangor University are leading a Wales-wide study into how modern life may be affecting rates of dementia.

The study also hopes to discover whether a decline in rates of dementia identified in a study of England has been seen in Wales.

Researchers will interview 3,500 randomly selected people aged 65 and over as part of the £3.3m project.

Professor Bob Woods, of Bangor University's Dementia Services Development Centre, said: "Dementia remains the biggest single challenge for health and social care in the 21st century. This large research project is replicating and extending a similar project conducted nearly 20 years ago. The study in Wales will add to our understanding of whether there are psychological and social factors, in addition to improved health and education, which are contributing to the significant reduction in dementia risk."

The report from the Cognitive Function and Ageing Study earlier this year, found dementia numbers in the UK have been in decline over the past 20 years.

The report suggested the figures for England, if applied to the whole UK, imply there are 214,000 fewer cases of dementia than predicted. That would mean around 670,000 people living in the UK with dementia, rather than the estimated 800,000 to 900,000.



Prof Bob Woods

The researchers from Bangor University intend to announce specific statistics for Wales next summer.

The results of the study will influence policy and planning for the ageing population in an era where one in five of the UK population will be over 65 and 5.5% over 80 by 2025.

Dr Gill Windle of Bangor University said the project will examine the effect of social changes on dementia rates.

She said: "People's lifestyles have changed dramatically over the last 20 years. Older people have very different expectations of life and different lifestyles to those of 20 and more years ago. People are more active and engage in more active leisure activities, as well as having healthier diets, but their expectations of services aimed at their age group have also changed. The survey will track some of those changes."

Professor Woods said: "We're looking at whether things such as being bilingual bring benefits in terms of mental agility in later life, and whether people's social lives and networks play a role in keeping their minds healthy. We're also looking at what role improvements in nutrition and diet may play in maintaining brain function."

The work is being led by Bangor University with research contributed by Swansea, Cambridge and Liverpool universities.