Early detection is key to tackling brain disorders

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Early detection and integrated healthcare are key to tackling brain disorders, argues David Nutt.

David Nutt | *Photo credit: European Brain Council*

Imagine not being able to talk because your speech centres have been affected by a stroke. Or not being able to feed yourself because your arms are too weak due to motor neurone disease.

Or not remembering the names of your grandchildren because of advancing Alzheimer's disease. These are confronting thoughts, but they are also the very real challenges that are faced by millions of Europeans living with a brain condition - mental and neurological alike.

Highly prevalent and disabling, brain disorders today will affect more than one in three Europeans during their lifetime. The European Brain Council (EBC) has been working for the past 15 years to reduce the burden of brain and mental ill health through our project work and studies, generating and

supporting evidence based approaches.

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One of them is the EBC milestone study on the "Value of Treatment for Brain Disorders" (VoT), published in June. In the past, healthcare systems were primarily hospital-focused. Considering the causes, effects and co-occurrence of chronic conditions as well as current health reforms, health systems transformation towards a more holistic and patient-centred care approach is underway in Europe.

The VoT study looked at how to address this by adapting care pathways to the needs of the patient rather than those of the system. We have done this through case study data analysis covering a wide range of neurological and psychiatric disorders.

These disorders are complex and interlinked conditions that have a great number of common denominators and challenges.

This is why it is essential to manage them in a more seamless and coordinated manner, as opposed to viewing them through separate medical 'silos'. The study identified the major unmet needs and causes for treatment gaps and examined health gains and the socio-economic impact resulting from best health interventions.

Our findings recommend prevention, early detection and integrated health care interventions. They also recommend more research to understand the causes of brain disorders.

We must take action to develop an EU-wide research and public health combined Brain Strategy.

And we must make the best use of existing resources and establish a European Brain Research Area that can address brain and mental health in a comprehensive and collaborative way.

This should, in turn, feed into national efforts and result in the development of National Brain Plans, mirroring successful national strategies in other areas such as cancer or diabetes.

We are already devising the next phase of the study that will see the enlargement of its scope but most importantly, we are rolling out the study's recommendations at the national level.

We invite you to visit the VoT page where you will find more information and we encourage you to partner with us in implementing its results: braincouncil.eu/vot

About the author

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