

Obtaining an early diagnosis of  
dementia is crucially important – the  
alternate view

Dr Roger Bullock  
Swindon



Irony is .....

# **cru·cial** (krooshal)

*adj.*

- 1. a.** Extremely significant or important: *a crucial problem.*
  - b.** Vital to the resolution of a crisis; decisive: *a crucial election.* See Synonyms at [decisive](#).
- 2. Archaic** Having the form of a cross; cross-shaped

# **di·ag·no·sis** (di-ag-no-sis)

*n. pl.* **di·ag·no·ses** (-sez)

## **1.** *Medicine*

**a.** The act or process of identifying or determining the nature and cause of a disease or injury through evaluation of patient history, examination, and review of laboratory data.

**b.** The opinion derived from such an evaluation.

**2. a.** A critical analysis of the nature of something.

**b.** The conclusion reached by such analysis.

# ear·ly (ûr-li)

*adj.* **ear·li·er, ear·li·est**

1. Of or occurring near the beginning of a given series, period of time, or course of events: *in the early morning; scored two runs in the early innings.*
2. **a.** Of or belonging to a previous or remote period of time: *the early inhabitants of the British Isles.*  
**b.** Of or belonging to an initial stage of development: *an early form of life; an early computer.*
3. Occurring, developing, or appearing before the expected or usual time: *an early spring; an early retirement.*
4. Maturing or developing relatively soon: *an early variety of tomato.*
5. Occurring in the near future: *Observers predicted an early end to the negotiations*

So the proposition is.....

- near the beginning
- the act or process of identifying or determining the nature and cause of a disease
- is vital to the resolution of a crisis

# Diagnosis is useful for.....

- Explanation and clarity
- Prognosis
- Opening pathways to treatment options

# Explanation and clarity

- Dementia is not a diagnosis – it is where parts of the brain communicate less well
- Alzheimer's disease is not just about plaques and tangles
- Very early diagnosis in AD is possible – but a third will not go on to develop dementia
- Good explanations not always forthcoming

# Prognosis

- Nihilistic predictions
- Long periods of stability
- A person does not change on the day of the diagnosis
- Services need much more psychological mindedness
- Disability versus disease models

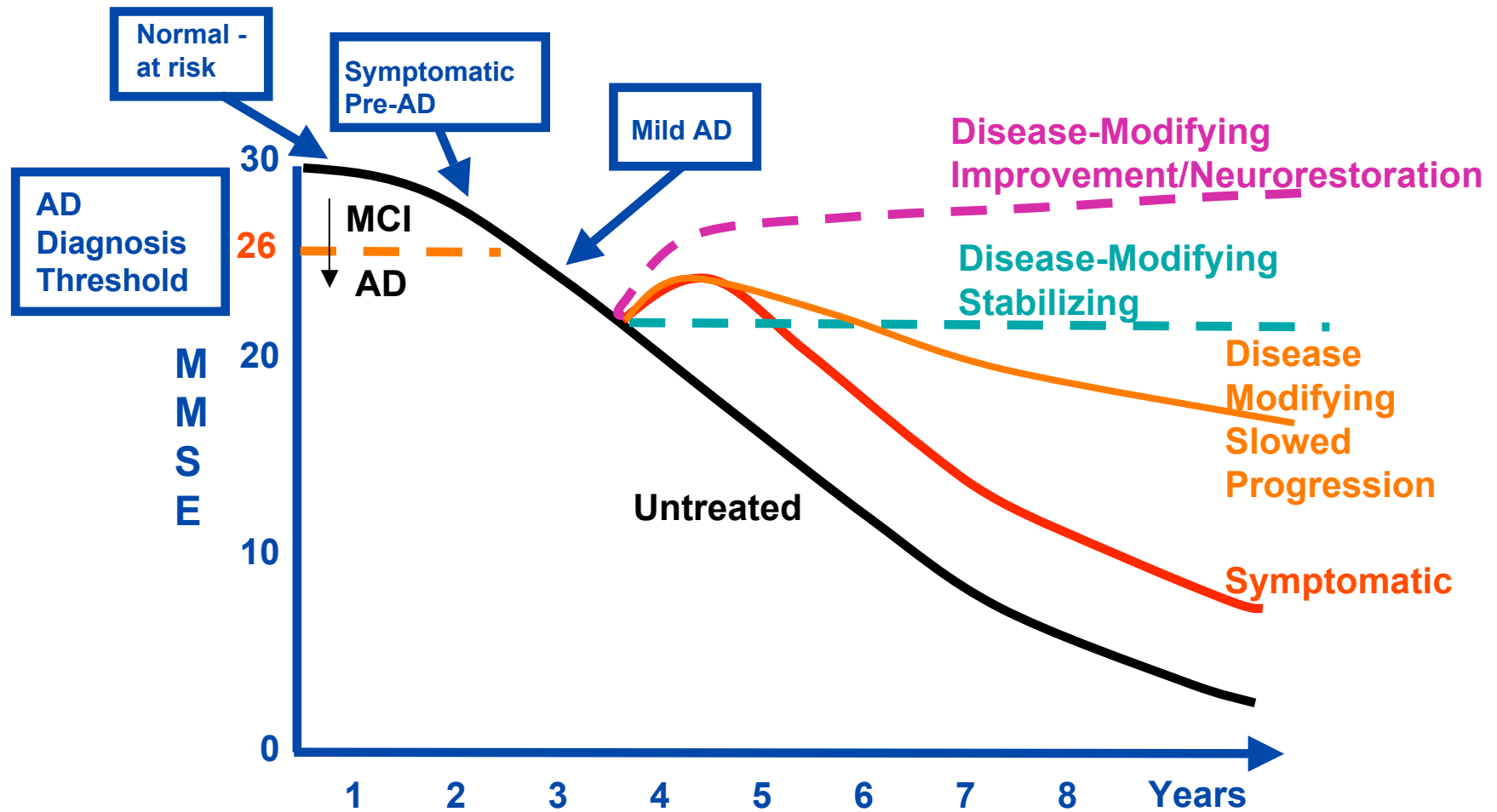
# Opening pathways to treatment options

- Cholinesterase inhibitors – not recommended early (p values do not always mean clinical significance)
- People wrongly labelled with vascular dementia
- Negative view of mental health in mainstream services
- Fear in general population
- Over compensation by relatives

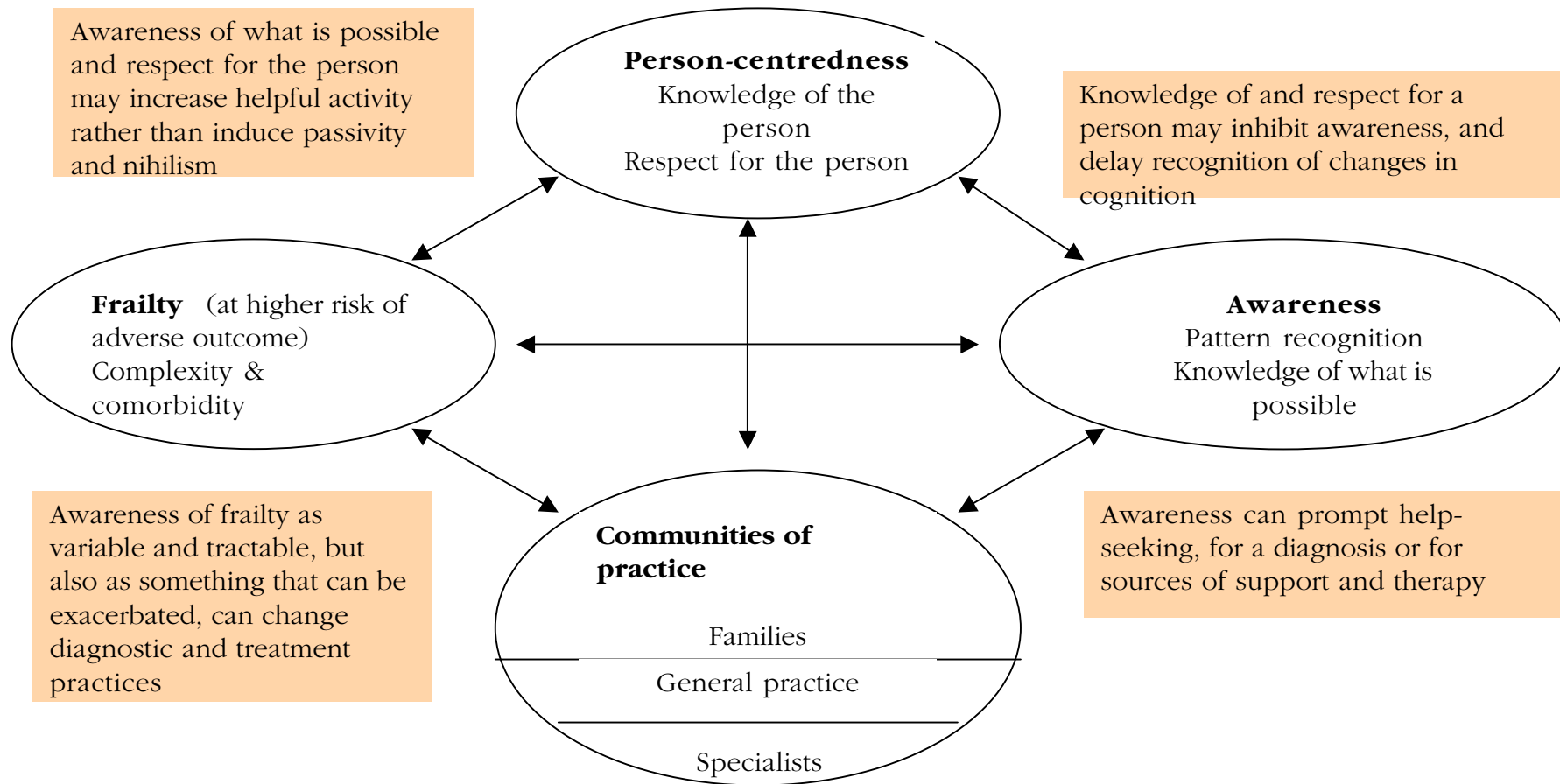
# How early?

- When somebody wants help – remember people can live quite well with cognitive disability
- When “tests” say so – and QoF registers need filling
- When something can be done
- It doesn't always happen with other illnesses either

# AD Treatment Horizons



# Cognitive impairment in its context



# No mention of diagnosis in this model

- Because what is needed is help not labels
- Cognitive impairment is common so must move out of the specialist domain
- The labels we currently use may be unhelpful

So if the house said....

Public awareness of cognitive disability should be sufficient to inform choice as to when to seek help when **symptoms are mild** and bearable and that this needs to be matched by available professional skills to explain what **may** be happening and possible strategies to minimise the effect....

I would be in favour – as this is honest, belies false expectations and sets the agenda we need in terms of services and reduction of stigma

# If early diagnosis is crucial

- We need to institute screening
- We will fall into serious ethical debates around choice
- In the absence of effective therapies we will make life potentially more difficult for individuals
- Would you be screened?