

Specialist rehabilitation for people with Parkinson's disease in the community: a randomised controlled trial

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Declared competing interests of authors: Funding received from the South East Coast Dementias and Neurodegenerative Disease Research Network and the NHS South East Coast.

Published December 2014

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02510

Plain English summary

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Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 51

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02510

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Plain English summary

Parkinson's disease (or 'Parkinson's') is caused by the deterioration of brain cells. Most people with Parkinson's are older. The condition makes it difficult for them to move, and many experience uncontrollable trembling. As the disease progresses, they require help with everyday activities such as eating, dressing and washing. There is currently no cure, and management of symptoms relies on medicines and rehabilitative therapies (physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy). A collaborative multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach to rehabilitation is recommended, but its effectiveness has not been widely researched. The Specialist Parkinson's Integrated Rehabilitation Team Trial (SPIRITT) sought to address this gap in evidence.

People with Parkinson's received a 6-week MDT intervention in their own homes, and the impact on their functioning and well-being was measured. Family carers were included in the trial (if they wished) to see if the intervention reduced their strain and stress. Some participants additionally received telephone calls and visits from a care assistant trained in Parkinson's for 4 months after the MDT intervention ended to see if ongoing support maintained improvements.

A total of 227 people with Parkinson's (plus 125 live-in carers) completed the 6-month study. The MDT intervention resulted in the improved psychological well-being of people with Parkinson's and carers, and a small reduction in Parkinson's disability. Ongoing care assistant support helped to maintain some benefits from the MDT, and to slightly reduce carer strain. Participants reported that they valued the information and advice from the MDT professionals. More research is needed to identify effective management strategies.

Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 08/1909/251. The contractual start date was in September 2009. The final report began editorial review in December 2012 and was accepted for publication in January 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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