

# Towards improved decision support in the assessment and management of pain for people with dementia in hospital: a systematic meta-review and observational study

S José Closs,<sup>1\*</sup> Dawn Dowding,<sup>2,3</sup> Nick Allcock,<sup>4</sup> Claire Hulme,<sup>5</sup> John Keady,<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth L Sampson,<sup>7</sup> Michelle Briggs,<sup>8</sup> Anne Corbett,<sup>9</sup> Philip Esterhuizen,<sup>1</sup> John Holmes,<sup>10</sup> Kirstin James,<sup>11</sup> Reena Lasrado,<sup>6</sup> Andrew Long,<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth McGinnis,<sup>12</sup> John O'Dwyer,<sup>5</sup> Caroline Swarbrick<sup>6</sup> and Valentina Lichtner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Healthcare, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Nursing, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

<sup>3</sup>Center for Home Care Policy and Research, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, New York, NY, USA

<sup>4</sup>Clinical Specialist, Pain Management Solutions, Nottingham, UK

<sup>5</sup>Leeds Institute for Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

<sup>6</sup>School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

<sup>7</sup>Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, UK

<sup>8</sup>School of Health and Community Studies, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

<sup>9</sup>Wolfson Centre for Age-Related Diseases, King's College London, London, UK

<sup>10</sup>Leeds Institute of Medical Education, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

<sup>11</sup>School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, UK

<sup>12</sup>Corporate Nursing, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds, UK

\*Corresponding author

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

It is difficult for people with dementia to communicate their pain to health-care professionals. Pain often has damaging effects on mental and physical health, and research has shown that pain is often poorly managed in people with dementia in hospital.

We aimed to develop a new system that would help staff to manage pain. To this end, we first identified any accurate and reliable pain assessment tools available for use with hospital patients who have dementia. We then explored how pain is currently recognised, assessed and managed in people with dementia in four hospitals in England and Scotland.

We found 28 pain assessment tools which had been reviewed, but none had been tested rigorously. Seven had potentially useful features, but no single tool could be recommended for wider use. The 11 hospital wards studied were all different, with their own complex pain assessment and management practices. Information from different staff and carers was produced at different times and in different formats, and was recorded in separate documents. This information was mentally pulled together into an 'overall picture' of pain by each staff member for each individual patient.

We suggest developing a combined education package and electronic health record, the Pain And Dementia Decision Support (PADDS) intervention, to help staff recognise, assess and manage pain. This should incorporate carer input, staff narratives, pain histories, intensity assessments, medication and other interventions provided, and present an overall picture of pain in an integrated and easily accessible visual format. This will require thorough development and testing.



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