

Managing diabetes in people with dementia: a realist review

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Declared competing interests of authors: Antony Bayer was a member of the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Dementia Themes Call Board from 2010 to 2011. Greta Rait is a member of the HTA Mental Health Methods Group and Panel. Jo Rycroft-Malone is the Director of the Health Services and Delivery Research (HSDR) programme and editor of the National Institute for Health Research HSDR journal. The authors declare no other financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous 3 years.

Published December 2017

DOI: 10.3310/hta21750

Plain English summary

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Health Technology Assessment 2017; Vol. 21: No. 75

DOI: 10.3310/hta21750

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Both dementia and diabetes mellitus are common in older people and many people may be living with both conditions. People living with dementia can find it more difficult to manage their diabetes. They are at increased risk of diabetes-related problems such as low blood sugar. Family members often help them to manage their diabetes.

In this study, evidence about the management of diabetes in people living with dementia was reviewed to find out what might work, how, why and in what contexts. Engaging with stakeholders throughout, we developed an initial 'theory' or idea about how interventions for people living with both dementia and diabetes should work. This idea was then tested and refined through a structured search for evidence. We then went back to the stakeholders to test out the findings of the review and refine them further.

The findings from this study indicate that services for people living with dementia and diabetes need to consider the following points.

- Self-management support for people with dementia and diabetes should focus on abilities and building confidence; the involvement of family carers is key.
- Health-care professionals need to have the skills to provide care that is tailored to the needs and priorities of the people with dementia and diabetes.
- Regular contact with a supportive health-care professional is likely to improve management of diabetes in people with dementia and can help to identify if they are having problems managing their diabetes.
- Family carers are likely to be involved in care and may need support and diabetes-related education. Further research in this area needs to look at how services can better fit with the needs of people with dementia and diabetes and their family carers.
- Technology needs to be tailored to the needs of people with dementia and their family carers, for example by promoting independence.

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 4.236

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, The Cochrane Library and the Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 13/138/03. The contractual start date was in June 2015. The draft report began editorial review in February 2017 and was accepted for publication in August 2017. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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