

Goal-oriented cognitive rehabilitation for early-stage Alzheimer's and related dementias: the GREAT RCT

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Plain English summary

The GREAT RCT

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Background

Cognitive rehabilitation (CR) is a personalised intervention to help people with early-stage dementia to manage everyday activities. This individualised therapy is conducted in people's own homes over several sessions. A therapist works with the person and the carer to identify realistic and relevant goals, plan how to tackle these and support people in achieving them. Previous small studies suggested that CR could be beneficial.

Methods

The Goal-oriented cognitive Rehabilitation in Early-stage Alzheimer's and related dementias: multicentre single-blind randomised controlled Trial (GREAT) was run in eight centres to find out whether or not CR improves everyday functioning. Participants were in the early stages of having Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia or mixed dementia, with a family carer involved. At the first assessment, participants identified areas in which they would like to see improvements, and set goals. Participants and carers rated how well participants were currently doing in relation to these goals and completed questionnaires, for example about mood and quality of life. Participants were then randomly selected to either receive CR or continue with treatment as usual (TAU). CR consisted of 10 weekly sessions with the therapist over 3 months, followed by four sessions over the next 6 months. Participants were reassessed after 3 and 9 months.

Results

We included 475 participants, and 427 participants (90%) completed the trial (209 participants in the CR arm and 218 participants in the TAU arm). After 3 months, the ratings by both participants and carers in the CR group showed that participants were doing significantly better in relation to their goals, and this was maintained 6 months later. Ratings for the TAU-arm participants did not improve significantly. There were no other differences between the groups. There was a strong economic case for CR.

Conclusions

Cognitive rehabilitation is effective in enabling people with early-stage dementia to improve their everyday functioning in relation to individual goals targeted in the therapy sessions. Next steps will focus on the implementation of CR into NHS and social care services.

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