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

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Declared competing interests of authors: Martin Knapp received funding from Lundbeck Limited (St Albans, UK) in relation to work on depression in younger adults and workplace mental health and from Takeda UK Limited (High Wycombe, UK) for advice on measures of the impact on carers of caring for people with dementia. Zoe Hoare is a member of the Health Services and Delivery Research Associate Board. Bob Woods received a grant from the Welsh Government via Health and Care Research Wales (Cardiff, UK).
Plain English summary

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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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 11/15/04. The contractual start date was in October 2012. The draft report began editorial review in September 2017 and was accepted for publication in January 2018. 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 and Social Care. 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 and Social Care.

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