

# Improving mental health and reducing antipsychotic use in people with dementia in care homes: the WHELD research programme including two RCTs

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## Plain English summary

### The WHELD research programme

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## Plain English summary

This programme addressed antipsychotic drug use and behavioural symptoms in people with dementia living in care homes.

First, we published literature reviews and focus group work that supported non-drug approaches to improving behavioural and psychological symptoms in people with dementia. Previous studies highlighted the potential value of personalised activities, social interaction and exercise. A review of available training manuals showed that there was a concerning lack of evidence for current training packages, with only 4 out of 170 manuals showing benefit for residents with dementia in clinical trials.

We conducted a clinical trial to see whether or not training in person-centred care could be enhanced through review of antipsychotic prescriptions, promotion of social interaction/personalised activities or exercise. Combining personalised activities with a review of antipsychotic medication led to both a 50% reduction in antipsychotic use and a significant improvement in some aspects of quality of life for residents with dementia. There was also a significant reduction in mortality. There were improvements in symptoms of agitation among people receiving the exercise intervention.

We then developed an optimised version of the Well-being and Health for people with Dementia (WHELD) programme by combining the effective elements. This was tested in a large randomised clinical trial, which involved 69 care homes and 847 residents over 9 months. The results demonstrated benefits in quality of life, a reduction in agitation and improvement in quality of care for residents in those homes who were receiving the WHELD programme, at a reduced cost compared with usual care.

The findings have been disseminated in numerous publications, a series of general practitioner outreach activities (workshops and online learning) and an update to national best practice guidelines, in addition to workshops with care home staff. The WHELD programme has provided important new information about the best way to provide training and support to empower and enable care home staff to substantially improve care for people with dementia.



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