

Understanding the challenges to optimal medicines use in people living with dementia and their caregivers

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Introduction: Dementia is a debilitating syndrome affecting both the patient and their caregiver. As cognition declines, family caregivers of people living with dementia (PLWD) may take on a range of activities including administering medicines. To be able to recommend ways to optimise the use of medicines in PLWD, a better understanding of the issues surrounding medicines management and administration is required. The aim was to identify the challenges to optimal medicines use (all prescribed and OTC) from the perspective of PLWD and their caregivers, in both the community and care home settings.

Method: Sampling from the community and care homes around London enabled involvement of patients in different care settings and at varying stages of dementia. Data were gathered in semi-structured interviews with PLWD, their family caregivers and care home staff; and also by observation of the administration process in care homes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; thematic analysis was employed. NRES ethical approval was obtained.

Results: A diverse sample was obtained; nursing and residential homes, caregivers ranging from spouses to daughters and PLWD across severities. Preliminary results highlighted many issues that affect medicines use including difficulties administering a variety of formulations; preferences regarding formulations at different stages of dementia; the impact of swallowing difficulties on medication use; practices used by caregivers to encourage adherence; impact on caregiver and impact on PLWD.

Conclusion: The study will enable the perspectives of caregivers and PLWD to inform recommendations for prescribing and administration of medicines; and enable health professionals to provide appropriate support.