

May 2020

1. A study of over 70'000 people across New South Wales and Victoria, examined their use of health services in the year before their death. The study explored the differences between people with and without dementia and the health services they accessed, rate of hospital and emergency department admissions, and prescriptions dispensed. The researchers found, with the exception of GP services, people with dementia, who died aged 65 or older with dementia as the underlying cause, used health services less in their last year of life than people without dementia. Women, irrespective of dementia status used health services less than men.

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2. A study by the College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University, aimed to determine whether intervention programs could be effectively delivered remotely via telehealth platforms in comparison with more traditional, face-to-face methods. Sixty-three people living with dementia, paired with their informal caregivers took part in the study, which randomly assigned either home-visit or telehealth delivery of the program. The data collected measured caregiver perceptions of change after the program, improvements in behavioural symptoms and ability to manage/perform activities of daily living. Both groups reported significant improvements in caregiver's perception of change with no significant difference in outcomes between the two groups.

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3. Researchers in the Czech Republic have examined the benefits of animal-assisted therapy, (in particular, dog therapy) with people who are living with Alzheimer's dementia. By analysing six studies, conducted over a two year period, the researchers looked at the effects of AAT on behavioural and psychological symptoms as well as changes or improvements to cognition, social interaction and physical health. They found that Animal-assisted therapy can improve the physical health of people living with dementia by increasing movement, motivation and activity, has positive effects on mental and emotional wellbeing, particularly in people in the early stages of disease and was shown to improve social behaviours, empathy and affection, and may improve mental cognition.

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4. Researchers at Western Sydney University have developed a set of best practice guidelines for the effective use of music playlists for people living with dementia. The guidelines outline strategies for identifying individuals who may be vulnerable to negative responses, provides tactics for creating playlists designed to address key challenges to care, and offers advice on program monitoring and the integration of music into care plans.

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5. Mindfulness program reduces inflammatory biomarker levels in older adults with mild cognitive impairment

In this study, 55 older adults diagnosed with MCI were randomly assigned to participate in either a mindful awareness practice program or a health education program (learning about hypertension, healthy diet, depression, exercise etc.) for one year. Researchers who assessed the outcomes at baseline, 3-month, and 9-month follow-ups. The researchers found that the mindfulness program was associated with reduced levels of several inflammatory biomarkers compared to the health education program. These findings have clinical implications, because inflammation is associated and has even been shown to be casual to brain changes associated with vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

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6. New dementia study to explore impact of COVID-19 social services cuts

The University of Liverpool is leading a new national COVID-19 study to explore the effects of social service closures on the lives of older people, people with dementia and unpaid carers. Family carers may now be struggling to provide enough support for their loved ones and those living alone with dementia may have found themselves completely shut off from much-needed social support. An expert team of NHS, voluntary and academic collaborators have been brought together to try and understand the immediate and longer-term implications of these COVID-19 related closures on the people most affected.

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7. New science shows how herpes can hasten the onset of Alzheimer's disease

Researchers at Tufts University have created a 3D brain tissue model of what they call the "potential causal relationship" in action, i.e. what happens when a virus like herpes begins interacting with the brain. After just three days of herpes infection, the researchers noted large and dense plaque formations of beta amyloids, as well as increased expression of some of the enzymes responsible for generating the plaques. They observed neuron loss, neuroinflammation and depressed signaling between neurons, as well as identifying 40 Alzheimer's-associated genes that were over-expressed, some of which are linked to the production of the beta-amyloid peptides found in plaques.

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