

# Advance reports

Included in this report are news of a new dementia assessment for GPs, the findings of the Dignity and Nutrition inspection and a new anti-dementia drug study.

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## New dementia assessment tool for GPs

Cambridge Cognition, a spin-out of the University, has launched the GP version of their memory test to aid early detection of Alzheimer's disease. The company is based on the ground-breaking work of University of Cambridge neuropsychologists Professors Trevor Robbins and Barbara Sahakian who co-invented the original test, the Paired Associates Learning test or PAL.

The company markets touch-screen neuropsychological tests, known as CANTAB®, and these have been used in over 500 universities, institutes and hospitals in over 50 countries around the world as well as for research published in over 700 peer-reviewed publications. The first mobile-platform version of one of these tests, CANTAB Mobile, will be widely available to GPs in less than a year following successful trials in NHS primary and secondary care settings. The test will allow GPs to triage patients presenting memory problems quickly, simply and accurately.

Cambridge Cognition is working with a UK Primary Care Trust Commissioning Board to set up a usage trial with a small

number of GPs to ascertain how CANTAB Mobile will integrate with—and optimise—current clinical and social care practice. The trial aims to set up a clear pathway of care and minimise the time taken for patients who fail the test to be referred to a specialist Memory Clinic, receive further tests, and receive a full diagnosis and relevant treatment. As part of the trial, a detailed programme of care and advice from local support services will also be given to patients in order to maximise their chances of living independently for as long as possible following diagnosis.

Traditionally memory screening is carried out by GPs using a pen and paper test, most commonly the mini mental state exam (MMSE).

The CANTAB Mobile test is a visual memory test, independent of language, proven to differentiate between patients with abnormal levels of memory loss due to dementia and the slight slowing of brain function that is expected in healthy ageing. The scoring is automated, ranked against a database of thousands of people, so human error and misjudgement do not affect the patient's score.

Professor Barbara

Sahakian, Professor of Clinical Neuropsychology at the University of Cambridge, said: "Alzheimer's disease generally starts by affecting the hippocampal formation in the brain. This brain area is important for episodic memory, including locating objects in space, such as where you left the car in the car park. Therefore, the earliest way to detect memory problems in Alzheimer's patients is to assess their episodic memory. One methodology that I'm familiar with, because I helped develop it, is the CANTAB Paired Associates Learning (PAL)—a method of remembering where things are in space. This was set up to evaluate and detect Alzheimer's disease early. It is hoped that earlier diagnosis will result in more effective interventions to prolong the patient's independence."

Doctors and scientists hope that the new test will speed up diagnosis of patients with early stage dementia, allowing more of them to be treated before the symptoms become acute.

The test can be administered by a nurse in a waiting room and will be downloadable as an application for iPad, and other mobile platforms. For more information, or if you are a

healthcare professional wishing to take part in the beta-trial, visit [www.camcog.com](http://www.camcog.com).

### Dignity and nutrition for older people

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) recently published its report on the overall findings of their Dignity and Nutrition Inspection (DANI) programme, an inspection of 100 hospitals in England of compliance to essential standards of care for dignity and nutrition.

It found that 83 of the 100 hospitals inspected were delivering care that met the essential standard for nutrition (ie. 17 failed) but 49 of the 100 inspected have been directed by the CQC to make improvements in their provision of nutritional care.

Dr Mike Stroud, Chair of BAPEN said: "Hospitals are legally bound to comply with the CQC's standards of nutritional care. It is unacceptable that hospitals 'spot-checked' by CQC were found to be non-compliant on essential standards of nutritional care, and disappointing that they were not entirely happy with standards of nutritional care seen in some other hospitals."

BAPEN has long campaigned for all patients to be weighed and screened for malnutrition on admission so that patients at risk can be identified and treated. If screening does not take place, malnutrition remains unidentified and untreated which results in increased complications, longer hospital stays and even death.

He added that hospitals have all the evidence, guidance and training materials they need—much of it provided by BAPEN. Therefore, they should by now have made nutritional care a

priority and have focused on redesigning systems to ensure that good nutritional care is delivered to all patients, whether that's help with eating and drinking, provision of special diets or supplements, or interventions such as tube feeding.

Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director leading Age UK's Hungry to be Heard campaign, said that the "findings show that nearly one in five hospitals completely fail to ensure that patients are eating and treated with dignity, and in total nearly half of all hospitals are not doing enough. This shows shocking complacency on the part of those hospitals towards an essential part of good healthcare and there are no excuses. Not ensuring that a patient eats well enough to aid their recovery is a basic failing—the importance of which Age UK has highlighted repeatedly over the years. We want to see the important work done by the CQC's spot checks strengthened. The Government must compel all hospitals to publish data showing malnutrition rates on their wards in a form the public can understand."

The report stated that some of the important issues were:

- Patients' privacy not being respected—for example, curtains and screens not being closed properly.
- Call bells being put out of patients' reach, or not answered soon enough.
- Staff speaking to patients in a dismissive or disrespectful way.
- Patients not being given the help they needed to eat.
- Patients being interrupted during meals and having to leave their food unfinished.

### Drugs can delay admission to care homes

Prescribing anti-dementia drugs to patients could help delay their admission to care homes, according to a new study published in *The Psychiatrist*.

A total of 339 people with dementia, who were referred to psychiatric services in Peasley Cross Hospital in St Helens in 2006, were studied. 127 of the patients (24%) had been prescribed cholinesterase inhibitors. Of the patients who were prescribed cholinesterase inhibitors, almost three-quarters (74%) were given donepezil. A further 14% were given galantamine, 8% rivastigmine, and 4% memantine.

The remaining 212 patients in the study were not prescribed cholinesterase inhibitors. After four years, the researchers followed up all 339 patients to see if they had been placed in care or remained in their own home. They found that, on average, patients who did not take anti-dementia drugs moved to care homes sooner than patients who did.

There was a delay in admission to care homes by a median of 12 months for patients who took anti-dementia drugs, compared to those who did not. However, after three years, an equal proportion of patients from both treatment groups had been admitted to care homes. In other words, the delay in admission was relatively short-lived.

Dr Emad Salib, a consultant psychiatrist and lead author of the research, said: "Our study provides some evidence to suggest that prescribing cholinesterase inhibitors is associated with a delay in care home placement in the first 2.5 years of treatment."