

The Right Prescription: a call to action on the use of antipsychotic drugs for people with dementia



There are around 750,000 people in England today living with dementia. Even though this is a progressive disease which gradually destroys a person's ability to make sense of the world they live in, we know that people with dementia can have a good quality of life at every stage in their condition and usually wish to remain active and engaged for as long as they can.

However, some people with dementia are deprived of this opportunity. The inappropriate prescribing of antipsychotic medication can have significant consequences for the person. Antipsychotics can increase people's symptoms of dementia and cause dizziness and unsteadiness, leading to falls and injuries and robbing people of their quality of life. It is estimated that over 20% of people with dementia, around 180,000 people, are currently being prescribed antipsychotic medication. In November 2009, the Bannerjee report highlighted these risks, and concluded that antipsychotics are too often used as a first-line response to behavioural difficulty in dementia rather than as a considered secondline treatment when other non- pharmacological approaches have failed.



Across England the **unacceptable** situation facing thousands of people living with dementia today is that they may be taking antipsychotic medication that they do not need, medication that could possibly harm them. **Every day** up to five people needlessly die and four people suffer significant avoidable complications as a result of taking medication that adds no value to their quality of life. This is an intolerable situation and it must change.

But there is hope. We know that many people - people like you - are doing some great work already. We've heard about community based programmes across health and social care where people with dementia have had a clinical review and agreed an alternative intervention to antipsychotic medication, through which they are enabled to live a full life being successfully cared for in their own homes and by teams in care homes.

We have a choice.

We can each of us choose to believe that this is someone else's responsibility, we can choose to continue to do things in the way we always have, we can choose simply to be outraged, but people with dementia who are prescribed antipsychotic medication will continue to suffer the intolerable condition and many more will join them.

Or we can choose to join the call to action, and share in the hope that so many people have already demonstrated, by playing our part in ensuring that people with dementia get the clinical review that they deserve, as well as securing a better future for ourselves, our loved ones and those of us without a voice for whom this might become a reality if we do not act.

But what needs to be done?

One of the biggest challenges we face is that, although there is a lot of activity and energy for change, unless that energy is directly translated into appropriate prescribing and appropriate review of medications, it will count for nothing.

We have been working with people like you; GPs, nurses, leaders in care homes, people with dementia and their families – those for whom this is a reality right now - pharmacists, psychiatrists and many others. They have organised themselves into eight groups who are committed to leading and taking action to ensure that every person with dementia on antipsychotic medication receives a clinical review and has an evidence-based, personalised care plan developed in partnership with them, their family and the multidisciplinary clinical team.

Help us to achieve our goal

Our goal is ambitious – it is that all people with dementia who are receiving antipsychotic drugs will have undergone a clinical review to ensure that their care is compliant with current best practice and guidelines, that alternatives to their prescription have been considered and a shared decision has been agreed regarding their future care by 31st March 2012.



Will you join us?

We ask you to commit to taking action **NOW** to change this unacceptable situation and join one of our eight commitment groups.

Please email **C2Adementia@institute.nhs.uk** and we will link you to the relevant group

If you would like to find out more, please visit **www.institute.nhs.uk/dementiac2a**

We look forward to welcoming you onto this call to action!