Understanding the quality of nutritional care for people living with dementia in care homes

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Introduction
Ensuring appropriate nutrition and hydration is an essential part of the delivery of dignity in care for people with dementia. Nutritional problems arise as a consequence of having dementia as the organisational, conceptual and physical skills required to manage eating and drinking become increasingly compromised and puts people at increased risk of severe malnutrition (under nutrition) and weight loss. The challenges of meeting appropriate nutritional and hydration needs continue to be reported.1

The purpose of this project was to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies required to understand the nutrition and hydration needs of people living with dementia.

Methods
Quantitative methods
- Quantitative measures of food and fluid intake were recorded over 5 days in 20 residents living in care homes specialising in dementia care.
- These residents also wore lightweight physical activity monitors (accelerometers) to record energy expended as well as activity.
- Mean age of participants was 78.7 ± 11.8 years, 50% were women.
- Confirmed diagnosis of a range of dementia types (early to mid stages).

Qualitative methods
- 9 focus groups and 5 interviews were conducted with all those involved in the care of people with dementia including nurses, managers, chefs, care workers, family members, dietitians and speech and language therapists across Dorset.
- Core themes were identified through thematic analysis of transcripts.

Results
The data evaluated has started to reveal the challenges in providing good nutritional care for care home residents with dementia.

- On average the majority of residents had adequate intakes to meet their energy needs.
- However residents who were displaying more wandering and pacing behaviours were less likely to be consuming enough energy.
- The daily intake of fluid was 1065 ± 836 ml (mean ± 2 standard deviations).
- Fifteen (83%) residents did not meet a minimal recommended fluid intake of 1500ml as shown.2,3

Conclusions and implications
Using this combined methodological approach, the results show that new strategies are needed to meet the nutrition and hydration needs, with a person centred approach to care for people living with dementia. It is important to ensure all staff are well trained and competent to encourage sufficient food and fluid intake.

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4. We would like to thank Birds Hill Nursing Home for kindly granting permission for the reproduction of certain images displayed in the circle of enablers diagram.