Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on care home residents with dementia, in Ireland

Elizabeth O’Donnell
Division of Health Research, Lancaster University

Introduction

- Care home residents in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) are at risk of loneliness and the adverse affects of social isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing measures.
- Studies link social isolation to cognitive decline, depression and disrupted sleep which may increase agitation behaviours in residents with dementia.
- Hence, social isolation associated with COVID-19 restrictions, may increase responsive behaviours in residents with dementia. Responsive behaviours arise in response to an unmet physical or psychological need and include a wide spectrum of behaviours including agitation, aggression & wandering.
- Therefore, this research aims to understand how COVID-19 restrictions, affects the wellbeing and behaviours of residents with dementia, to inform practice and policy changes to support care home staff and residents.

Preliminary findings

Care home staff in Ireland describe how social isolation, associated with COVID-19 restrictions, affects the wellbeing of residents (fig 2)

Care homes staff quotes describe the impact of social isolation, associated with COVID-19 restrictions, on the wellbeing of residents with dementia

Preliminary Results

Care home staff quotes describe the impact of social isolation, associated with COVID-19 restrictions, on responsive behaviours

Changes in responsive behaviours, associated with dementia, during COVID-19 restrictions in Ireland (fig 3).

Responsive behaviours during COVID-19 restrictions (preliminary findings of ongoing study)

- Two-thirds of care home staff did not observe increases in responsive behaviours during COVID-19 restrictions.
- Care staff noted that some residents with dementia were calmer due to absence of visitors/strangers
- Care staff reported less resident-to-resident aggression due to social distancing measures.
- One-third of care home staff observed increases in responsive behaviours during COVID-19 restrictions.

Conclusion

- Preliminary findings indicate that social isolation is associated with physical and cognitive decline, increased symptoms of depression and anxiety and sleep disturbance in care home residents with dementia in ROI.
- One-third of care home staff reported increases in responsive behaviours in residents with dementia during COVID-19 restrictions, however, two-thirds of care staff did not observe an increase in responsive behaviours, such as agitation, aggression and wandering. Several care home managers noted that residents with dementia were calmer due to absence of visitors/strangers and reduced resident-to-resident aggression.
- The findings will be presented to the Health Services Executive (HSE) and the Health and Information Quality Authority (HIQA) in ROI to inform policy and practice changes to support care home staff and residents.

Key References


Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Dr. Caroline Swarbrick and Professor Carol Holland.