# Sharp decline in prescribing of antipsychotic drugs for patients with dementia

The percentage of dementia patients being prescribed antipsychotic drugs fell sharply over the last 6 years, says a new report from the Health and Social Care Information Centre (2012).

However, there was strong regional variation, with rates of prescribing of antipsychotic drugs up to six times higher in some areas than in others. The use of antipsychotic medication can lead to serious side effects for people with dementia.

The first ever national primary care audit on the subject shows the percentage of dementia patients being prescribed antipsychotic drugs fell by ten percentage points in the last 6 years – from 17% in 2006 to 7% in 2011.

Information from nearly 197 000 people with dementia from more than 3800 practices in England was submitted to National Dementia and Antipsychotic Prescribing Audit. The audit found a 52% reduction in the number of people with dementia receiving a prescription of antipsychotic medication from 2008 to 2011, and a 68% increase in the number of people newly diagnosed each year with dementia from 2006 to 2011.

There is a higher prevalence of diagnosed dementia in women (66%) than in men and the majority of people diagnosed with dementia were aged 65 years and above (95%).

Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive of the Alzheimer's Society, commented on the audit: 'This momentous achievement is not just about statistics, it is about the lives of tens of thousands of people with dementia. Credit is due to the many doctors, nurses and care workers without whom this would not have been possible.'

Mr Hughes continued '... Now is the time to move from fourth gear to fifth to ensure everyone's prescriptions are reviewed and that only those people who benefit are kept on antipsychotics. They must only be a last resort.'

Health and Social Care Information Centre (2012) National Dementia & Antipsychotic Prescribing Audit 2012. www.ic.nhs.uk/dementiaaudit (accessed 24 July 2012)

# Polypill trial shows substantial health benefit

Results of a randomized trial carried out by academics at Queen Mary, University of London, show that a four-component Polypill given to people aged 50 years and over to reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke, the most common causes of death worldwide, achieved large reductions in blood cholesterol and blood pressure, the main causes of these two diseases (Wald et al, 2012).

The results observed in the trials had been accurately predicted in an earlier paper (Wald and Law, 2003) before any Polypill had been made.

The Polypill contains three blood pressure-lowering medicines and a statin for lowering cholesterol. This was given to people without a history of cardiovascular disease aged 50 years or more. They experienced a 12% reduction in blood pressure and a 39% reduction in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels, achieving levels typical of people aged 20 years.

'The health implications of our results are large. If people took the Polypill from age 50, an estimated 28% would benefit by avoiding or delaying a heart attack or stroke during their lifetime; on average, those who benefit would gain 11 years of life without a heart attack or stroke,' said Dr David Wald, principal investigator of the trial.

The study was a randomized placebo-controlled cross-over trial in which each person took the Polypill for 3 months and a placebo for 3 months, in random sequence. The cross-over design and the high adherence to treatment among participants meant that the trial produced highly accurate and reliable results with each person acting as his or her own control.

This is the first trial in people selected on the basis of age alone without the need for a medical examination or tests – setting the scene for the prevention of first heart attacks and strokes in the general population without requiring a medical examination or special tests.

Wald NJ, Law MR (2003) A strategy to reduce cardiovascular disease by more than 80%. *BMJ* **326**: 1419–24

Wald DS, Morris JK, Wald NJ (2012) Randomized Polypill Crossover Trial in People Aged 50 and Over. *PLoS ONE* 7(7): e41297

## Velaglucerase alfa improves bone mineral density in Gaucher disease

Shire's velaglucerase alfa (VPRIV) shows significant improvement in Gaucher-related bone disease. In a head-to-head trial with imiglucerase, patients treated with velaglucerase experienced statistically significant improvement in lumbar spine bone mineral density at 9 months.

## Faster diagnosis of Noonan syndrome disorders with new genetic test

A new one-step test will improve the speed and clarity of diagnosis for a range of genetic disorders known as RASopathies. It has been developed by NewGene in collaboration with the South West Thames Regional Genetics Service at St George's Healthcare NHS Trust in London.

## Improving management of hypos in type 2 diabetes

A new website (SayNoToHypos.co.uk) has launched to encourage clinicians to talk with patients who have type 2 diabetes about the dangers of hypoglycaemia, as part of a dedicated campaign 'Say No To Hypos'.