

Dementia and Cognitive Decline

Introduction

In the UK, Dementia affects approximately 900,000 adults over the age of 65 years. Some projections suggest that this number will increase substantially - by 2040, it is estimated that 1.6 million people will have this diagnosis.¹ Primary care teams face challenges when managing patients with suspected or confirmed dementia in terms of:

- deciding who should be assessed for dementia, how best to do this, and when to refer to secondary care
- explaining the benefits and risks of medicines for dementia to patients and carers
- being involved in post-diagnostic support after dementia is confirmed
- making assessments about capacity and being involved in decisions regarding power of attorney
- advising on safety to drive and when to inform the DVLA
- managing patients with advanced dementia who may be exhibiting features of Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD)

This module will be different from others in the PBSGL programme in that it will have only one case to study. The module will follow a patient over some years of care – from initial diagnosis to established symptoms. We hope this module will complement a further one in production (polypharmacy in the context of multimorbidity) and both topics take into account some of the shared features of Realistic Medicine.

Module aims:

This module will cover the following:

- how to assess a patient presenting with memory concerns
- differential diagnoses of dementia and importance of considering depressive illness
- overview of cognitive tests
- recommended primary care investigations
- when to consider a dementia diagnosis and when to refer to secondary care for a formal assessment
- risk and benefits of dementia medicines
- post-diagnostic support for patients with a recent diagnosis of dementia
- assessment of capacity, and power of attorney
- safe driving
- management of advanced dementia including Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Depression (BPSD), advanced care planning and palliative care