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Press Release

Chronic pain in elderly is focus of new study

New ways to help older people suffering chronic pain are the focus of a study now underway by the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Foundation Trust, also known as 'the Min', and St John's Hospital in Bath. Residents and carers at St John's Hospital, a charity providing almshouse accommodation to older people in need, are taking part in the study. The study is looking at the design of new treatments.

Around 1 in 8 adults in the UK are estimated to suffer chronic pain, and this prevalence increases with advancing age, with half of older people reporting pain and up to 80% of those in residential care.

The study aims to learn what older patients and carers feel is needed and to develop new treatments to enable older people with chronic pain to be more active and independent.

Dr Lance McCracken, consultant clinical psychologist for the pain services at the RNHRD and lead researcher for the study said:

"Chronic pain is an underappreciated problem in older people and can present different challenges than in younger patients. Older people are often more sensitive to medications, may have multiple health problems, can be more stoical in the face of pain, and sometimes do not ask for help when it could benefit them, typically doing this so as not to bother or to present a burden to others."

Medications alone often do not provide lasting relief for many people, so approaches aimed at changing behaviour patterns are often used to help patients cope better with their pain. Behaviour change can be challenging to make and maintain.

Dr McCracken said: "It requires more than mere desire, "willpower," or positive beliefs. The latest methods for promoting healthy daily functioning for those with chronic pain focus on what is called 'psychological flexibility'. This includes the capacity for facing life's challenges in ways that are open, aware, and most importantly, active."

The treatment approach described here, called Contextual Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT), is already available within the NHS but it is accessed almost exclusively by working age adults and younger people. This study aims to look at whether the same approach can be adapted to specifically help older people.

Dr McCracken added:

"CCBT is more intensive, potentially more individual, more experience-based and more respectful of a patient's ability to create change themselves. For all these reasons, this approach should be highly applicable to older people, and the study will tell us whether this is the case."

Jonathan O'Shea, chief executive of St John's hospital, which is part funding the research, said: "As one of the country's leading almshouse charities, providing round the clock domiciliary care, we are delighted to be involved with such an important piece of work, which will ultimately benefit our residents, and many other older people. We very much look forward to the findings of the study."

Groups of older people with chronic pain and carers at St John's will take part in small group discussions about the kinds of services that are needed and how they should be delivered.

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Notes for Editors:

- The RNHRD NHS FT is a national specialist rehabilitation and rheumatology hospital based in Bath. Offering services to adults, children and young people, the trust has expertise in general and complex:
 - rheumatological and musculoskeletal conditions
 - neurological rehabilitation
 - chronic pain management
 - chronic fatigue syndrome/ME
 - www.rnhrd.nhs.uk

St John's Hospital is a registered charity providing Almshouse accommodation, community grants and individual financial support to deprived people in Bath. The historic charitable trust is as old as Bath itself. Founded in 1174, it has served the community for over 800 years. Today, its vision is to provide an improved quality of life, through housing and support for older people, and through grant making, for others who are disadvantaged in some way.