

# Optimising the use of medicines in aged care facilities

## What was the study background?

People with dementia may experience and express pain in different ways to people without dementia. For this reason people with dementia are typically prescribed less pain relieving medicines (analgesics) than people without dementia. The benefits of pain relieving medicines must be weighed against the potential for adverse effects, particularly drowsiness. Opioid pain medicines can cause drowsiness.

## What was the purpose of this study?

The primary purpose was to investigate the association between the use of pain relieving medicines, pain and drowsiness in residents of aged care facilities.

## What did the study involve?

The study was conducted in 6 Resthaven aged care facilities in South Australia. In total, 383 residents were interviewed by a research nurse between April and August 2014. The nurses recorded which pain relieving medicines had been used by residents in the previous 24 hours. The nurses also recorded whether residents were feeling drowsy and how much pain they experienced.

## Who conducted the study?

This study was conducted by a collaboration of researchers from Monash University, University of Adelaide, University of South Australia and University of Sydney, as well as the staff and residents of Resthaven Inc.



## What were the study findings?

- Nurses reported that residents with and without dementia experienced similar levels of pain, although residents with dementia were less likely to be able to self-report their level of pain
- More than 70% of residents had used pain relieving medicines in the previous 24 hours
- Use of pain relieving medicines was similar among residents with and without dementia
- Residents with dementia were more likely to feel drowsy than residents without dementia
- Residents who used opioid pain medicines were not more likely to feel drowsy than those who did not use opioid pain medicines

## What do these findings mean?

- Drowsiness was more common among residents with dementia, although use of opioid pain medicines did not contribute to this drowsiness
- It is likely that clinicians noted which residents were likely to feel drowsy and avoided prescribing opioid pain medicines to these residents

## Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information please contact:

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## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Alzheimer's Australia Dementia Research Foundation via the Resthaven Incorporated Dementia Research Award, with additional funding provided by Resthaven Inc.

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