

What changes happen over time for PWPs and their carers?



Project information

Lead researcher	Dr Carl Counsell
Location	University of Aberdeen
Cost	£188,685 over 3 years
Start date	February 2010
Type of project	Project grant
Project code	G-0914

Project background

One of the most important things for people with Parkinson's and their carers to consider is how Parkinson's will affect them over time. This means health professionals need to have clear, realistic and useful information to give people. The best way to get this information is to follow a group of people for life, right from the moment they're diagnosed. You also need to study a control group of people without Parkinson's (with the same mix of age and gender) to find out which effects are just due to getting older.

But there hasn't been a study like this for Parkinson's yet. That's partly because it's quite hard to get matching groups of enough people with and without Parkinson's, and partly because the research takes a long time. As a result, we don't yet have enough information about what might happen to people in the medium or long-term.

Some of the important questions for people with Parkinson's are:

- How will the motor and non-motor symptoms develop?
- Will I experience side effects from Parkinson's medication?
- Will life be as long as it might have been without Parkinson's?

The answers to these questions can affect how disabled people feel overall, their day-to-day life and the wellbeing of carers.

What the researchers are doing

Dr Carl Counsell and the team in Aberdeen have already begun the work of finding out what happens over time with Parkinson's. They've been following a group of 210 newly diagnosed people with Parkinson's for the past 2.5 years. They've also been following a group of about 280 people without Parkinson's in their study. The team have compared the two groups on how disabled they are in terms of getting around and whether they have any complications from taking medication. They've also compared the groups on depression, mental ability, whether they've had hallucinations, their bodily functions and whether they've needed care in an institution.

In this study the team will continue to follow the two groups for another 3 years. The aim is to find out what happens in the medium term. The researchers have also followed a group of about 200 carers for 2.5 years and will continue to track their progress for the 3 years of this study.

How the research will help people with Parkinson's

This project will give us vital information on the medium-term prognosis for people with Parkinson's and related conditions. We'll be able to see whether previous information on smaller groups applies to everyone who has Parkinson's. We'll find out which problems are due to Parkinson's and which are just due to getting older. We'll also find out about the impact of caring for people with Parkinson's on the carers' mood and day-to-day life.

We may even discover some new information that points to a cause, or whether any medications for other conditions (such as inflammation) affect how Parkinson's progresses. And in the long term, the team might also be able to use their results to make predictions about who is likely to develop certain conditions.

For more information, please talk to the Research Team

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