Treating people with Parkinson’s in Tanzania

Project information

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<tr>
<th>Lead researcher</th>
<th>Professor Richard Walker</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>£37,874 over three years</td>
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<td>Start date</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of project</td>
<td>Project grant</td>
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<td>Project code</td>
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Project background

Back in 2007, Professor Richard Walker and his colleague Dr Catherine Dotchin carried out a Parkinson’s UK funded study to find out more about Parkinson’s in rural Tanzania. Before this study little was known about the condition in sub-Saharan Africa. But they identified 33 people with Parkinson’s from a population of 161,000 – which is lower than the UK prevalence, but significantly higher than previously thought.

- Most of the people they identified were unaware they had Parkinson’s and so they had not sought medical help or been treated before despite having the symptoms for many years.

- The people they identified have now been receiving treatment with levodopa for the past three years. They’ve had the condition for different lengths of time, experience a variety of symptoms and are at different stages of Parkinson’s.
● But long-term treatment with levodopa can lead to side effects such as the uncontrollable movements known as dyskinesia. So what effect has starting treatment had in this group of untreated people – some with fairly advanced Parkinson’s?

What the researchers are doing

In his new study, the team will continue to follow the Tanzanian people from their original study for a further three years. Tanzanian Parkinson’s nurses trained in the UK are closely managing the patients by visiting them every month, while Richard and Catherine monitor and supervise treatment by email and yearly visits.

This approach will allow the team to carefully monitor how Parkinson’s treatment affects wellbeing, the progress of the condition and spot any side effects that develop.

How the research will help people with Parkinson’s

Studying this unique population will add to our understanding of Parkinson’s and how effective medication is. In particular, the researchers hope to learn more about what causes the side effects of drugs, such as dyskinesia. Is it taking the drugs for long periods, or is it related to how long a person has had Parkinson’s? Understanding this will ultimately help develop better ways to manage the condition and prevent side effects as Parkinson’s advances.

If this innovative approach to managing Parkinson’s works, it could provide a blueprint for other developing countries. Richard and Catherine are hopeful that this project could bring widespread and affordable care for people with Parkinson’s in sub-Saharan Africa closer.

For more information, please talk to the Research Team

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