

BEFRIENDAS

BEFRIENDING for Depression, Anxiety and Social support in residential aged care

It is estimated that 52% of people living in residential aged care facilities have significant depression symptoms and a higher prevalence of older people in residential care have major depressive disorder compared to those living in the community. The reasons for higher prevalence of depression in residential care than in the community are considered to be a mix of individual physical health factors, high prevalence of grief and loss among the residents, and the social environment.

The goal of this research is to reduce rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness and increase social support in people living in residential aged care.

Who is conducting the research?

The project is being administered by the National Ageing Research Institute. The project team is: Prof Colleen Doyle, Prof David Dunt, Prof Daniel O'Connor, Assoc Prof Sunil Bhar, Assoc Prof Christina Bryant, Assoc Prof Briony Dow, Dr George Mnatzaganian, Ms Marcia Fearn, Dr Emily You, Dr Anne-Marie Bagnall.

Who is funding the research?

The research is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council and Beyond Blue.

What are the study objectives?

This study proposes to investigate the impact of a course of befriending delivered by trained volunteers to alleviate primarily depressive symptoms and second to alleviate anxiety, improve social support and relieve loneliness. This research builds on our previous work addressing depression and anxiety in older adults with comorbidities, specifically chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.



Ella (volunteer befriender) and Lily (resident) enjoying each other's company

Who is eligible to participate?

Residents with up to mild cognitive impairment and at least mild depression (a score of 8 or greater on the Cornell Scale for Depression in Dementia on the most recent ACFI review and 4 or more on the Geriatric Depression Scale as assessed by the research team) can participate. We are hoping to have approximately 45 aged care facilities and approximately 600 residents involved in the study over a three year period. In each residence there may be only a small number of residents eligible to participate at any one time.

Volunteers are eligible to provide the befriending if they are over the age of 18 years, have a police check (this can be arranged by NARI), have a recent influenza immunisation and COVID-19 immunisation, undergo the training provided and commit for a minimum of 6 months.

What is the befriending intervention?

Befriending will be delivered weekly for a period of 4 months, face-to-face or via telephone or video calls, by volunteers. Befriending conversations will consist of neutral topics of interest to both parties, including discussions around hobbies, family, neutral news topics and other topics determined between the two parties and tailored to individual interests. Each befriending session will be audio recorded, with permission from the participant, and a random

sample of recordings will be assessed for treatment fidelity.

All volunteers will undergo training prior to starting the befriending program with residents.

Who will train the volunteers?

NARI will provide training and quality monitoring of volunteers in the study. Volunteers will come from a variety of sources but will all undertake the same training and checks.



Volunteers working with Project Lead, Prof Colleen Doyle at the befrienders training

How is the effectiveness being measured?

The primary outcome measure is the resident's depression. Secondary outcome measures are their anxiety, quality of life, social support and loneliness. Assessments will be undertaken at baseline, during the befriending program and at the conclusion of the program.

As a secondary measure we are also interested in exploring what impact the befriending program has on the volunteers delivering the befriending.

I think it's made me a little bit better...when there's no one around I used to just sit there and do nothing. Not talk to anybody or anything...I'll really tell you, she's very very helpful. Oh yeah (made me feel) much better...I always ask her when she's coming back.

(BEFRIENDAS participant).

The project has received approval from the Austin Health Human Research Ethics Committee (ref HREC/45941/Austin-2018) and the NARI Research Governance Committee. These committees follow National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for conducting research with people in Australia.

A project management team consisting of the project Chief Investigators (Prof Colleen Doyle, Prof Sunil Bhar, Prof David Dunt, Prof Daniel O'Connor, Dr George Mnatzaganian, Prof Julie Ratcliffe, Prof Briony Dow and Assoc Prof Christina Bryant), Associate Investigators and researchers will have regular meetings to discuss all aspects of the project.

A project advisory group (PAG) will provide input into the policy and practice implications of the study and assist with dissemination of project outcomes.

The project has been registered on the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR), ref number: ACTRN12619000676112

(<http://www.ANZCTR.org.au/ACTRN12619000676112.aspx>).

COVID-19 update – Remote contact added

The BEFRIENDAS team are working with aged care providers to make sure the project is operating within the local biosecurity guidelines for COVID-19. As a result we will be offering participants the alternative to face to face befriending - a remote intervention with contacts delivered via phone or digital technology such as tablet or iPad. All contacts, including researcher interviews, will be offered remotely instead of face to face as an alternative where preferred.

For further information, or to discuss how your residential aged care organisation can participate, or to participate as a volunteer please contact:

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