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## Dolls 'help Alzheimer's patients'

**Dolls and teddy bears can help people with Alzheimer's disease interact and communicate with others, researchers have found.**



The team from Newcastle General Hospital studied the benefits of dolls after seeing how one patient bonded with a teddy bear from her son.

Patients bond with and care for the dolls, and staff found the toys gave them something to talk about.

The research was presented to a British Psychological

Society Conference.

Alzheimer's disease patients can lose their intellectual, social and emotional abilities over time.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested patients offer ways to either interact with or take care of something that they seem to have a sense of ownership and responsibility for.

Dolls appear to alleviate agitation or distress, help overcome communication difficulties, and reduce withdrawal.

They are sometimes used in "reminiscence scenarios" to stimulate memories of an earlier rewarding life role such as that of a parent.

### 'Quality of life'

In the small-scale study, 14 residents in a Newcastle nursing home were given a doll or a teddy bear.

They were then assessed over a 12-week period.

Researchers found patients interacted better with staff and other residents.

Dr Ian James, who worked on the study, said: "Using toys to help people with dementia has been looked at before as it is an important, non-drug based approach to behaviour disturbances in dementia residents.

"What we have done with this study is to look at their use over a longer time period and to investigate whether patients chose to have a doll or teddy bear.

"The findings will, we hope, help advise other clinical teams in their use of this technique."

**“ This exciting and innovative research shows how important it is to engage people in meaningful activities in all stages of dementia ”**

Clive Evers, Alzheimer's Society

He added: "We found people who wouldn't have spoken at all before would speak.

"Clearly, using a doll doesn't reverse dementia, but it did seem to improve quality of life."

Around 50 dementia patients now have dolls or teddies as part of the group's research.

### **Connecting**

Clive Evers, director of information at the Alzheimer's Society, said: "This exciting and innovative research shows how important it is to engage people in meaningful activities in all stages of dementia.

"Reminiscence and attachment therapy is one way to connect with people in the later stages of dementia."

He added: "There could be many reasons that some people with dementia enjoy having a doll."

But Dr Evers added: "It is important to remember that dolls and teddy bears will not work for everyone.

"People with dementia benefit enormously from a range of activities and care homes should try to find activities that suit different individuals."