Chris Albertyn

Tell me about your research
The focus of my PhD is to improve the quality of life for people living with dementia in UK care homes. Behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, such as agitation, anxiety, aggression and sleep disturbances are common and distressing for residents, carers and family members.

When non-drug therapies don’t work for these symptoms, patients are often prescribed anti-psychotic drugs which can be risky. I’m currently exploring whether a cannabinoid-based medicine is a safer alternative. We’re working with dementia residents in nursing homes to conduct a trial of an oral spray drug which is already approved for use in Multiple Sclerosis.

This project began after hearing relatives and carers had been using over-the-counter cannabinoid-based products to help patients without consistent evidence. More research was needed to find out if it was effective and safe for people living with dementia.

What motivates you?
I’m deeply motivated by positive patient outcomes. I had been working in dementia clinical trials for four years before my PhD. Seeing day to day life in care homes meant I knew my PhD would be in dementia research, with an ultimate goal to improve quality of life for care home residents.

Are there any myths about your work which bother you?
The first myth is cannabis is a panacea which will solve everything. We need solid evidence for what it can and can’t do. With a lot of commercial interest in cannabis, I’m also keen to ensure the independence and objectivity of our research. We are independently funded by Alzheimer’s Research UK and there is no external influence from the drug developer. The trial has been patient focussed with their input all along.

In an ideal world, where do you see your work in the future?
We would have a safer and more effective medication which can be used with other therapies such as massage and music therapy.

About the artwork
Chris talked a lot about people being at the heart of his work and how hitting the target and getting an effective therapy means including patients and carers in everything - Hana

This project was kindly funded by:
Alzheimer’s Research UK