

Addressing the Polypharmacy Challenge in Older People with Multimorbidity (APOLLO-MM)



Polypharmacy (the use of multiple medicines by one patient) is on the rise and is a global safety issue. Older age and larger numbers of medications contribute to escalating risk. We define polypharmacy as a 'wicked problem' and this project is an in-depth exploration of polypharmacy as it plays out in contemporary practice.

What did we do?

We studied the experiences and practices of polypharmacy across patients' homes, general practices and community pharmacy with a focus on people age 65+ and prescribed 10+ medications. We followed 24 patients for up to 2 years and conducted observations in 3 GP practices and 4 community pharmacies. We used a wide range of approaches - observations in the field, narrative interviews, cultural probes, co-design - to understand why medicines practices are often hidden from view.



How is it helping?

We have identified new concepts to understand this problem and potential solutions. We have produced a suite of freely available e-learning materials through the Royal College of General Practitioners which encourage professionals to 'think differently' about polypharmacy. We have also worked with patients using a co-design process which – alongside our findings from the wider study – provided inspiration for a series of seven fictional storybooks and an accompanying website with audiobooks called 'Let's Talk Differently about Medicines' (medicinstalk.co.uk). These stories are designed to change the nature of discussion between clinicians and patients about their medicines and care, to give patients greater control and understanding over their medications.

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