Summary of PhD project for the December 2020 ARC Fest
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Facilitators and barriers to engaging with community support services in dementia: A mixed-methods approach of addressing health inequalities

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Theme: Health Care Across the Life Course

There are currently 850,000 people living with dementia (PLWD) in the UK[1]. Dementia holistically impacts individuals and progressively leads to cognitive and functional decline. These hardships are known to extend beyond PLWD and affect their informal carers, who are often family or friends. There is currently no cure for dementia, and, as prioritised in the NHS Long Term Plan[2], further efforts are required to support PLWD and their informal carers to live well within their communities for as long as possible.

Social care accounts for the largest costs in dementia post-diagnosis care[3]. Within the umbrella of social care, community support services are non-clinical services delivered to support PLWD and their informal carers to live well within their communities. Community support services encompass a large range of activities including paid home care, support groups and organised leisure activities. Timely access and uptake of community support services are key to enable PLWD and their informal carers to live well within their communities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated nationwide public health measures, have compelled radical changes in the provision of services. Within dementia post-diagnosis care, face-to-face community support services have, for the most part, grossly reduced[4][5]. The detrimental impact due to limited access or non-access to community support services on PLWD and informal carers who previously used the services, is emerging.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that some community support services are reactively adapting to continue to provide support[6][7][8]. However, little is known how community support services have adapted, which types of services are available and who have access to them. Therefore, this PhD project seeks to understand how community support services have adapted and, with the aim of reducing health inequalities, to explore the barriers and facilitators of accessing community support services for PLWD and informal carers during COVID-19.

[1] https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/facts-media
[2] NHS Long Term Plan. 2019
[3] Alzheimer Society. 2014
[4] Giebel et al., 2020. 'Impact of COVID-19 related social support service closures on people with dementia and unpaid carers: a qualitative study'. Aging & Mental Health, DOI: 10.1080/13607863.2020.1822292
[5] Giebel et al., 2020. 'A UK survey of COVID-19 related social support closures and their effects on older people, people with dementia, and carers', International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, DOI: 10.1002/gps.5434
[6] Cheung and Peri, 2020. 'Challenges to dementia care during COVID19 – innovations in remote delivery of group cognitive stimulation therapy', *Ageing & Mental Health,* https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2020.1789945
[7] Goodman-Casanova et al., 2020. 'Telehealth Home Support during COVID confinements for community dwelling older adults with mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia', *Journal of medical Internet Research*, DOI: 10.2196/19434
[8] https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-08-20/2020-challenges-tough-decisions-and-our-path-forward-help-people-affected-dementia