DOMS lets clinicians ‘speak the same language’

The Dementia Outcomes Measurement Suite (DOMS) is a free, evidence-based web platform designed to assist clinicians improve the assessment of dementia. Adam Bentvelzen, Liesbeth Aerts, Katrin Seeher, Belinda Goodenough and Henry Brodaty introduce an important update to this resource and its new user-friendly website.

Determining the presence of dementia in a person and assessing their cognition, function and behaviours can be complex. The many available measures and large amount of research can make it difficult to choose the best instrument to assess a particular individual in a particular setting for a particular purpose. Measures that are popular with clinicians may not necessarily have the best evidence-base or be applicable in all clinical scenarios.

The Dementia Outcomes Measurement Suite (DOMS), launched in 2007 and recently updated, aims to clarify best practice in screening, assessing and monitoring people with dementia across different domains. If clinicians become familiar with and agree upon a selected number of recommended measures or instruments, they will be able to ‘speak the same language’ when assessing dementia (Sansoni et al 2007) and communication will become more efficient.

The DOMS project was one of the first major pieces of work commenced by the Dementia Collaborative Research Centres (DCRCs). The Australian Department of Health and Ageing engaged Associate Professor Jan Sansoni, Principal Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong, as project lead, along with a team of researchers, including the authors, and an advisory committee of Australian clinicians, to determine ‘best practice’ in screening, assessing and monitoring people in different domains of dementia, including cognition, staging, function, delirium, behaviour and quality of life. Many scales and measures were identified. The review process initially reduced these to a shortlist which included only those which were sufficiently validated for use with dementia populations and clinical settings.

Each short-listed measure was then assigned a numerical rating according to detailed criteria including reliability and validity, sensitivity to dementia, cost, and ease of use. By choosing the scales with the highest ratings in each domain the group derived a set of recommended measures. For example, the Global Deterioration Scale (GDS), Clinical Dementia Rating scale (CDR) and the Dementia Severity Rating Scale (DSRS) were the measures which ranked best as tools to stage the severity of a diagnosed dementia.

The DOMS update

The original DOMS website was developed in 2010 to distil the findings of the review and make it easier to access the recommended measures. This website has been very successful, with a monthly average of 1400 unique visitors and 4400 downloads. Aside from minor updates, however, a comprehensive update of current best practices and the website itself was long overdue.

The update was recently completed by the DCRC: Assessment and Better Care (DCRC: ABC) DOMS team, with help from an expert steering committee. There’s now an increased focus on clinical practice with wider coverage of different:

- types of dementia, including fronto-temporal dementia
- severities of impairment, including mild cognitive impairment
- clinical settings, including primary care versus specialist clinics
- assessment modalities, including performance-based measures of function (eg ‘cognitive impairment interferes with independence in everyday activities’).

The rating scheme was updated to reflect these changes and included greater emphasis on clinically-relevant psychometrics. The scope has also been expanded to an international audience.

The updated website (dementiakt.com.au/dom) was launched in July 2016 with a more modern and user-friendly interface suitable for computers, smartphones and tablets (see below left). The new website provides PDFs of the recommended measures, along with user manuals and web links to helpful resources.

Visually appealing and user-friendly resources on the website make it easy to compare different scales and assess their ‘best use’ via a simple and intuitive ‘traffic light system’ (see above).

By keeping the content and the look of the online DOMS platform contemporary, it continues to encourage best practices in dementia care and management. We believe that ‘speaking the same language’ is the first step to more efficient communication between clinicians and will ultimately lead to better patient care.

For more information or to give feedback on the updated website, visit dementiakt.com.au/dom or email DOMS@unsw.edu.au.

References


Acknowledgments

The DOMS team comprises: Adam Bentvelzen, Research Assistant, DCRC: ABC, UNSW, Australia; Dr Liesbeth Aerts, Research Associate, DCRC: ABC; Dr Katrin Seeher, Visiting Fellow, DCRC: ABC; Associate Professor Belinda Goodenough, Knowledge Translation Program Manager, DCRCs and NSWAC1 DTSS; and Professor Henry Brodaty, DCRC: ABC Centre Director and ChiefBA Co-Director.

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