Acceptability of a tailored Mediterranean lifestyle education resource among patients with mild cognitive impairment: a qualitative study


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BACKGROUND

Research evidence suggests that greater adherence to a traditional Mediterranean diet (MD) is neuroprotective and may help reduce dementia risk. There is a need to understand how best to achieve behaviour change towards a MD, particularly in non-Mediterranean and high-risk populations, for example, individuals with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI).

Changing dietary and lifestyle behaviour is complex and is a challenge faced by clinicians and researchers. The Medical Research Council framework for developing complex interventions (Craig et al., 2008) suggests that interventions grounded in theory have been deemed more effective. The Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) (Michie et al., 2014) is based on 14 theoretical domains and is used to help design, develop and deliver behaviour change interventions. It can ensure the specific needs of the population are targeted and the barriers and enablers to dietary change are understood by the researchers in order to maximise engagement in the proposed intervention.

We developed a MD educational resource for MCI patients in accordance with the MRC guidance (Craig et al., 2008), based on a systematic literature review and informed by qualitative work (Neill et al., 2013) with the target group. This refined resource was evaluated by structured interviews with MCI patients using the TDF framework (Michie et al., 2014).

AIM

The aim of the current research was to evaluate the acceptability of a Mediterranean Lifestyle Education Resource with MCI patients and to understand the barriers and enablers to dietary change in this population group.

METHODS

The Mediterranean Lifestyle Education Resource, "THINK-MED" consisted of:
1) Mediterranean Lifestyle Education for Memory - Information Leaflet
2) Four seasonal recipe books
3) 7-day Mediterranean Diet menu plans
4) Mediterranean Lifestyle Education for Memory – Memory Book
5) Calendar

This resource was posted out to participants one week before the interview for their review. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis framework, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was applied to the transcribed data. The TDF was used as an initial coding framework and was then expanded to reflect the emerging themes from the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

n=16 MCI patients (plus two relatives) took part in structured interviews (mean age = 77.0 years). Seven interviews took place face-to-face in the Centre for Public Health, QUIB with one via telephone as this was more convenient for the interviewee. There was an equal number of male and female participants.

A summary of the key findings, matched to the appropriate TDF domain is detailed below.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this qualitative study was to evaluate the acceptability of a tailored Mediterranean Lifestyle Education resource with MCI patients. Analysis of the interview feedback received using the TDF, highlighted important themes and constructs relevant to this target group. Overall, the resource was well received by participants, however discussions highlighted the need to consider adaptations so that the educational resources and associated intervention could be tailored to the needs of an older population.

This information was used to further refine the Mediterranean Lifestyle education resource, "THINK-MED", before its evaluation through a pilot randomised controlled trial, which is currently underway.