

Bristol early career dementia researcher gets £170K boost from charity



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BY [ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH UK](#)

The announcement from the UK's leading dementia research charity comes during Dementia Action Week (17 - 23 May) as part of a wave of new funding to support early career researchers whose research has been hit hardest by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Dementia is a devastating illness that affects nearly a million people in the UK. One-quarter of people who died in the UK from COVID-19 also had dementia. Dementia Action Week challenges people to join efforts to bring about a future free from the fear, harm, and heartbreak of the condition.

Medical research has not been immune to the impacts of the ongoing pandemic with an Alzheimer's Research UK survey finding one in three researchers are considering leaving the field altogether. Now, thanks to the efforts of dedicated supporters, Alzheimer's Research UK is able to fund six new projects worth £920,000, including research at the University of Bristol.

Dr Jonathan Blackman, as part of a team at the University of Bristol, will explore whether a chemical called dopamine, which occurs naturally in the brain, could help break a negative cycle associated with sleep problems and Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia.

The project leads on from work by Dr Coulthard, also at the University of Bristol, showing that increased dopamine can influence sleep and memory in healthy people. In this project using a brand-new sleep-tracking technology, Dr Blackman will test whether the same happens for people with Alzheimer's. The technology will be worn as a headband and,

if it can accurately measure sleep patterns in people with Alzheimer's, this project will lay the groundwork for large-scale clinical trials, with thousands of volunteers.

Speaking about his new funding, Dr Blackman said:

“As an early career researcher, getting the backing of funders like Alzheimer's Research UK is a real career boost. COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on people with dementia, and it is also disrupting research into new ways to help. “We hope that this research into sleep and dementia will be a step towards unravelling the complex relationship between the two. As larger clinical trials will hopefully follow from this project, we will need to see more people get involved in dementia research to take forward research findings from similar studies.”

Dr Susan Kohlhaas, Director of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

“Over 87,000 people in the South West have dementia and this number is set to rise in the coming years. Alzheimer's Research UK is only able to support Dr Blackman's work thanks to the generosity of the public and the support from our partners from Bristol and the south west over the last year. We can't afford to lose momentum in dementia research and we are committed to supporting a new generation of researchers as they aim to tackle essential questions whilst establishing their own careers.

“The fallout from COVID-19 makes it even more important to invest in life-changing research, and better understand the diseases that cause dementia, so we can stop them in their tracks. Dementia Action Week is about doing something, which can make a real difference. We saw with COVID-19 that volunteers make a huge difference in accelerating research and volunteers are critical in our effort to tackle dementia.

“Our Dementia Research Infoline is open if you want to find out more about this new sleep project or register interest in taking part in other dementia studies. If you have any other questions about dementia we're here to help. Our team have already handled over 25,000 enquiries, ring us today on 0300

111 5111 or email us at

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