Creating a module on ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’ for the Healthtalkonline website

A new module on ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’ has been created for the Healthtalkonline website, as part of the SomnIA (Sleep in Ageing) project. This module will enable people with sleep problems to learn about older people’s experiences of poor sleep, how they cope with different aspects of poor sleep and the strategies they use to improve their sleep.

These personal stories will also enable family and friends, doctors, nurses and other health professionals to better understand the experiences of older people who have poor sleep. In addition, the module includes a Resources section for further information about sleep.

This new website module is based on in-depth interviews with older people who have sleep problems and who were identified through a postal survey of 1158 people aged over 65 (see SomnIA Briefing Paper 2). The interviews were conducted in people’s own homes, and where respondents agreed, interviews were videoed or audio recorded for inclusion on the Healthtalkonline website.

This briefing paper introduces some of the many topics that older people raised as being important in terms of their quality of sleep. For further information, and to view or listen to the interview extracts online, please visit the website at: http://www.healthtalkonline.org/ and select ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’.

‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’: a website module

In-depth interviews with 39 people aged 65-95 were recorded for the Healthtalkonline website. Thirty-three of the interviews were videoed and six were recorded on a digital audio recorder. Everyone who consented to the use of their interview for the website was given the opportunity to read the transcript and make changes if they wished. They also approved a biographical summary of themselves for inclusion on the website.

A selection of topics was identified from all the interviews and overviews were created, which include video, audio and written clips from the interviews to illustrate the topics. Examples of the topics related to ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’, which are on the Healthtalkonline website, include:

- Age, ageing and changes in sleep
- Dreams
- Health, illness and pain
- Strategies for good sleep
- Advice for others
- Retirement and current employment
- Sleep medication, other medication and over the counter remedies
- Worries
- Impact on daily routines
- Daytime sleep
- Sleeping elsewhere
- Describing current sleep
- Going to the doctor or chemist
- Bedroom and environment for sleep
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Healthtalkonline* is the award-winning website of the DIPEx charity and replaces the website formerly at dipex.org.

Healthtalkonline shares people’s experiences of health and illness. You can watch or listen to videos of interviews, read about people’s experiences and find reliable information about conditions, treatment choices and support.

*www.healthtalkonline.org

www.somnia.surrey.ac.uk
The following are just two extracts from the 182 video, audio and written clips which feature under 21 topic overviews from the Healhttalkonline website module on ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’.

### ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’: Going to the doctor or chemist

Daniel would not go to the chemist for help with his sleeping as he is concerned that anything from over the counter might interact with his existing medication. (Aged 78, previously diagnosed with Sleep Apnoea and heart problems)

**Interviewer:** “Have you thought about getting anything over the counter or seeing a pharmacist to say I’m having real difficulty sleeping can you recommend something’, or bought anything at a chemist?”

**Daniel:** “I wouldn’t because I’m on a certain level of medication, but I’ve been told once or twice by the GP that for instance there are certain painkillers I mustn’t take, because I’m on Warfarin, and also I’m on other tablets as well for my heart and that. And therefore I’ve been told I have to be very careful with that. So no, I’d have to go to my GP. But now you have asked that, I remember I do have some sleeping tablets prescribed by the GP and that would be the route I would take. Having said that I don’t take those sleeping tablets too often because I don’t want to get, well, addicted is the word that comes to mind. I don’t want to get reliant on any sort of medication, although I am on these regular tablets.”

### ‘Sleep Problems in Later Life’: Daytime sleep

Juliet was loath to nap during the day, as suggested by her physiotherapist, because she didn’t want to be in a daily set routine. (Aged 69, has rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes)

**Juliet:** “Well I just, I suppose somebody might say ‘oh well you think it [napping] is synonymous with old age’. It is not that. It’s that I feel if I got into that sort of body rhythm [a daily nap], and I was out for a day you sort of feel tired when I wanted to do something else and be with people and what have you, and I don’t like these set routines that people can get into. I didn’t disregard it and I did say to her, ‘okay yes’, and I do fall asleep. In fact, it happened yesterday as it happens. I had been watching the athletics because I enjoy watching that, and I think all those people, that dreadful climate in Japan, and I suddenly sort of felt quite tired and I just sort of turned the television down and closed my eyes and I had gone, but equally there are days when I am busy in there and it varies, and so I don’t like routines that you can’t get out of really.”

For further information about the SomnIA research project, or to obtain copies of other Briefing Papers please either visit the website, www.somnia.surrey.ac.uk or contact:

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