

## The newsletter of the ASCEND Study

Autumn 2016 – Number 15

We would like say a big **THANK YOU** for all of your support for ASCEND over the years. This study will produce important results which will affect the treatment received by millions of people with diabetes around the world. It helps to ensure these results are robust if as many of you as possible continue to complete the follow-up questionnaires and, if you can, continue the study medication. Thank you for your valuable contribution to this important study.

*Professor Jane Armitage and Dr Louise Bowman*



### ASCEND the final year and beyond

ASCEND will finish in autumn 2017. You will get your final follow-up form between January and June 2017. Please could you make an extra effort to complete this form? It is important for us to have information about your health right up to your final follow-up form.

The ASCEND results will not be available until 2018. This is because it takes time to chase up remaining questionnaires, ensure the information is accurate and analyse the results. We will write to you with the results and they will be available on our study website. You will be sent more details about the end of the study with your final follow-up form.

#### **ASCEND post-treatment follow-up**

Your contribution to ASCEND could be even more valuable because of post-treatment follow-up. Continuing to collect information about your health after the end of your participation in the study could help to answer important questions such as whether aspirin affects cancer risk. In Issue 13 we reported on research which suggests that aspirin might help to prevent some cancers such as bowel cancer, but this is difficult to study as any effects of aspirin on cancer risk might take many years to appear.

After 2017, we will continue to request information about you from NHS registries allowing us to assess

any long term effects of aspirin and fish oils, including any effects on cancer risk. At the beginning of the study you agreed for us to request this information about you. Any information we receive would be stored securely in computers at Oxford University. We never share your confidential data with anyone else.

#### **Where would this information about me come from?**

ASCEND requests information about you from NHS Digital which holds information nationally from the records that health and social care providers keep about the care and treatment they give; this information received by ASCEND includes information about hospital attendances or admissions (called Hospital Episode Statistics or HES).

We send your identifiable data (name, date of birth, NHS number and postcode) securely to NHS Digital who have a record of all hospital admissions and outcomes data from the HES dataset and will link this information to individual ASCEND participants. NHS Digital also provide us with information relating to cancer registrations on behalf of Public Health England. In addition NHS Digital provide us with information about participants who have passed away, including the date and cause of death. This information is supplied by NHS Digital on behalf of the Office for National Statistics.

If you no longer wish to let us use such information about you, do not want us to continue to request this information after the end of the study or have any questions about this, please contact the trial team.

#### **Where can people find out more?**

They can:



visit the ASCEND website: [www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/ascend](http://www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/ascend)



call a member of the study team: (Freefone) 0800 585323



## Aspirin, fish oils and eye-sight

Diabetes can affect your eyes and your ability to see. The most common and serious problem is diabetic retinopathy, which is caused by damage to the delicate network of blood vessels at the back of the eye known as the retina. Studies from the 1960s first suggested that tiny blood clots blocking blood vessels in the retina could start a chain of events that results in diabetic retinopathy. Because aspirin is known to reduce the risk of blood clots elsewhere in the body, doctors thought that it might be a useful treatment for diabetic retinopathy, but there were also concerns that it might cause bleeding in the eye. Two previous studies have assessed the effect of aspirin on diabetic retinopathy, but results were inconclusive.

Given the large numbers of people in ASCEND who have now been taking aspirin or placebo (a dummy tablet) for several years, we have the chance to assess whether aspirin might help to protect against diabetic retinopathy, and other important eye diseases such as macular degeneration and cataract.

More information about how ASCEND plans to assess the effect of the study treatments on eye-sight will be sent to you soon.



## Could aspirin protect your brain?

It is recognised that there is a link between diseases of the heart and circulation (such as heart attacks and strokes) and dementia. Risk factors for circulatory diseases such as smoking, diabetes and high blood pressure also predict dementia risk. However, it is not known whether treatments such as aspirin, which help to prevent circulatory problems, might have an effect on memory and brain power (cognitive function) and effect the risk of dementia.

Few previous aspirin trials have assessed cognitive function. In those studies, aspirin did not have any effect on cognitive function but they did not include enough people to be able to detect a small, but potentially important, effect.

Cognitive function has been assessed in previous studies using a set of standard questions asked over the telephone or using a secure online test.

We are grateful to Alzheimer's Research UK who have provided a grant to allow us to measure cognitive function in ASCEND participants. More details will be available soon.

## Winter in South Africa

Each November, the ASCEND office receives a call from one participant asking for her study medication to be sent out ahead of schedule. This way she never misses a day during her annual migration to South Africa. She developed a deep connection with the continent while spending 7 years working in Zimbabwe. Her trips to South Africa are now filled with meeting up with old friends, particularly helping a close friend who runs an amazing charity which has rescued over 900 abandoned babies from around Johannesburg (see photo). You can read more about their work at:

[www.tlc.org.za](http://www.tlc.org.za) Another friend helps to co-ordinate a "miracle train" which provides high quality health-care, particularly sight saving eye treatment, to less privileged people in South Africa. You can read more at: [www.phelophepa.transnetfoundation.co.za](http://www.phelophepa.transnetfoundation.co.za) "My leave of absence each year is an absolute delight to me" she told the ASCEND team. "I have more friends south of the equator than in the UK."



## Welcome to ASCEND

Welcome to Jude Black who joined the ASCEND team in 2016. Jude trained as a nurse before working in research. She also works on the Million Women Study co-ordinated by the University of Oxford.



## New ASCEND website

We have recently updated the ASCEND website. Please go online and have a look. If you have any suggestions or comments about the site then do get in contact.



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ASCEND is coordinated by the *Clinical Trial Service Unit* of the *University of Oxford*



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