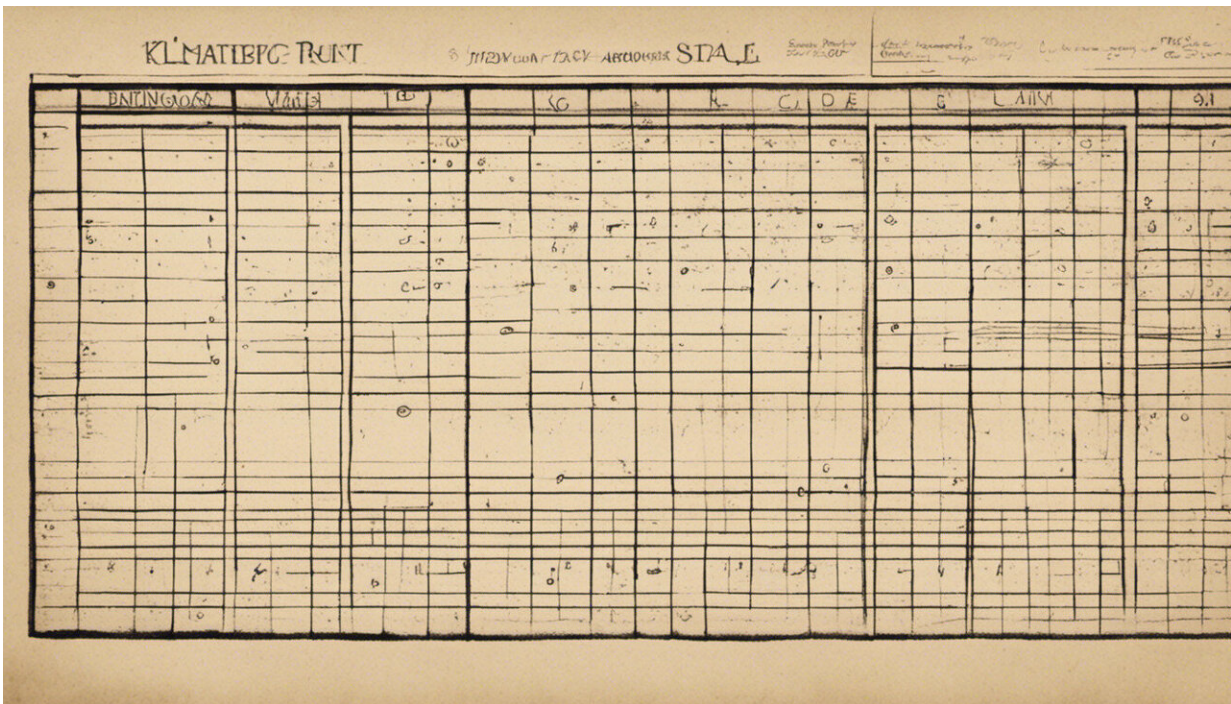


Score card to pinpoint depression risk in older West Aussies

May 31 2016, by Kerry Faulkner, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

WA doctors could soon have a score card to rank diabetic patients on their likelihood of developing depression in old age.

The score card would be similar to one doctors use now to assess the risk of cardiovascular disease, which takes into account contributing factors

like blood pressure and blood fats to calculate the patient's risk of stroke or heart attack.

The risk score is then used in deciding how to treat those factors.

More than 14,000 Western Australians are estimated to have [diabetes](#).

UWA researcher Osvaldo Almeida devised the score concept after investigating the link between how long a patient lives with diabetes before developing [depression](#).

He observed a group of nearly 5500 Perth men aged 70 to 89 years, who were part of Health in Men Study.

Eleven per cent of the study group reported past depression and 6.5 per cent currently had depression.

There has been a great deal of debate over the last decade around whether diabetes causes depression, Professor Almeida says.

He expected a clear link showing the longer a person lived with the disease, the greater the likelihood of depression.

Study results surprise researchers

However, he was surprised by the results which showed diabetics may experience depression early in life, around the time of diagnosis but this reduces as the patient comes to terms with the diagnosis and starts to manage the disease.

However, depression then resurfaces in later life and this was likely exacerbated by frailty or poor health accompanying ageing.

Diabetics are more often overweight or obese because of their inability to exercise and so the detrimental impacts of ageing like poor circulation, heart problems, kidney problems and chest infections are magnified, Prof Almeida says.

These things are not limited to people with diabetes; they apply to people with other medical conditions too, like stroke and [heart attack](#) victims and [chronic pain sufferers](#) who similarly will be prone to depression.

This suggests that the health complications of ageing, not necessarily how long a person lives with diabetes, are behind increased depression, rather than how long people have lived with diabetes, he says.

"What we do know is that numerous risk factors can be modified," he says.

"In diabetes and depression physical activity, smoking, diet and use of alcohol can contribute and some of these elements are modifiable."

They are currently devising the card to predict whether diabetics will develop depression over a five year period.

More information: Osvaldo P. Almeida et al. Duration of diabetes and its association with depression in later life: The Health In Men Study (HIMS), *Maturitas* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.maturitas.2016.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2016.01.003)

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