



Making additional/special observations meaningful for patients living with a diagnosis of dementia: a practice development project on the importance of patient engagement during additional observations in an acute general hospital setting

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Project background

Recent studies have identified that at least 25% of acute hospital beds are occupied by people with a diagnosis of dementia and that only 2% of people surveyed found hospital staff understood the specific needs of these patients. Stepping Hill Hospital provides care and treatment to more than 80 people with a diagnosis of dementia every month. Traditionally, one-to-one observations are used across all wards in the hospital to reduce risk of falls and physical aggression, and to increase patient safety. Due to the demands of working in a busy acute hospital environment and a lack of training in communicating with people with dementia and the use of de-escalation skills, staff nurses often rely on hospital security or hospital security staff, known locally as 'bed watch', to assist with observing patients who display highly aggressive or violent behaviours.

Aim

The aim of the project was to improve the experience of patients living with a diagnosis of dementia who are placed on additional observations in a ward setting. To achieve this, the objectives identified were to:

- Review current policy and develop a therapeutic observations and engagement policy within the trust
- Ensure all staff are aware of and completing the *This is Me* booklet
- Provide learning and development opportunities for staff in the use of de-escalation techniques, conflict resolution and management of challenging behaviour to enable staff to explore alternative strategies
- Develop an alternative to security staff or bed watch undertaking one-to-one observations to promote patient safety

Implications for practice

- Involving the right stakeholders collaboratively from the beginning of a project ensures a more creative and innovative approach is taken
- It is important to consider a variety of factors, such as the person, environment, family, training and equipment when developing care
- It is helpful to visit other areas of new and innovative practice to gain evidence and inspiration for your own project work

This project was supported by the FoNS Patients First Programme in partnership with The Burdett Trust for Nursing

Online

Further information about the project can be accessed from: fons.org/library/report-details?nstdid=73127

Key activities and outcomes

• Review and development of the new therapeutic observations and engagement policy

The project lead was involved, via a trustwide dementia steering group comprising widespread and varied stakeholders, in developing the new policy and completed the sections relating to management/identifying triggers of challenging/complex behaviour, development of a risk assessment tool for assessing the required level of additional observation, care planning documentation and a recording chart.

• Launch of the new therapeutic observations policy and delivery of training to staff across the hospital

The project lead and the policy development lead delivered the equivalent of four days' worth of training to staff in 15-minute chunks. Training was geared toward managers, so they could cascade the information to their staff.

Developing a business case for an enhanced care team

The project lead went on a visit to Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, where a team of staff had been employed to look at making additional observations more therapeutic for patients living with dementia. The staff employed have specialist skills and training to support patients with dementia in the hospital and are called the 'enhanced care team'. Following this visit, the dementia steering group worked to develop a business case for a similar team.

• Enhanced care team business case outcome

The trust board approved the business case and provided the funds to support recruitment of the team internally. Seven healthcare assistants were recruited and started on the wards in the medical directorate. Feedback from staff on the wards since the team went operational has been positive, with only one patient having sustained a fall while receiving one-to-one care from the team. The effectiveness of the team is being monitored by the finance department on a two-monthly basis, and the hospital's matron for dementia care was given the go-ahead to recruit three more healthcare assistants to the team after the first two months.

• The dementia café

The dementia café was developed in collaboration with the estates department, Stockport College A-level students and charitable funds. The café is located near the entrance to the hospital and provides a quiet space for people with dementia to relax away from the ward environment, and also a space for carers to get support and relax. The space can be used by families and staff as well, and will on occasion be used as an information and support space for patients with a diagnosis of dementia and their families.

This support is provided by [Alzheimer's Society](#) and [EDUCATE](#) (Early Dementia Users Co-operative Aiming to Educate) group.