



FoNS Improvement Insights

Working in Partnership with Patients and Families on a Dementia Assessment Unit to Improve Care

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Project background

Best practice recommends that people with dementia should be cared for, where possible, in the community and assessment units sited within general hospitals to facilitate accessibility to diagnostic investigations and treatment. This strategic vision was integrated into a newly formed Trust corporate plan, culminating in the phased closure of psychiatric hospital beds and movement of patients and staff into a purpose built Dementia Assessment and Treatment Unit and a community based long stay facility. The 'old' culture of dementia care is primarily based on a 'medical model', with little consideration given to the subjective experience of dementia, in meeting the person's psychosocial and emotional needs. The project provided an opportunity to incorporate a more 'person centred approach' to dementia care into the new facilities within the Trust.

Aim and objectives of the project

The project aimed to work in partnership with patients, families and staff to enable the development of a person centred approach to dementia care.

The objectives were to:

- Develop a shared vision for working in partnership with patients with dementia and their relatives
- Develop an information leaflet for relatives
- Introduce the principles for a new culture of dementia care

Key activities and outcomes from the project

A number of approaches were adopted to facilitate and evaluate the intended changes to practice. These included facilitation of workplace culture workshops for multi-disciplinary staff (n=44) and the promotion of a more person centred approach to dementia care. The workshops enabled staff to explore their values and beliefs towards the development of a shared vision for dementia care. Workshop feedback included:

- The care that staff believed patients should receive and how this could be achieved
- What the staff contribution could be to meet the vision of person centred dementia care

- What would help staff to achieve this and identifying potential barriers to its implementation

From a number of competing priorities, improving communication and sharing information were the most pressing concerns. Improved information and orientation signage included 'patient status at a glance' and 'activities' boards and the development of 'memory boxes' to act as an 'aide memoire' to individual bedrooms.

Four interest groups involving staff were formed focusing on; developing an information leaflet for relatives and carers, life story work training, enhancing the mealtime experience and making the environment more welcoming and person centred.

Planning improvement to the environment was the most challenging of all the project activities in balancing regulatory requirements, whilst still making the surroundings conducive to person centred care in a busy Dementia Assessment Unit.

An observational visit by an external project facilitator on progress with the mealtime experience prompted staff to stand back from the project and observe, revealing further options and increased momentum with the project.

The project has enabled the staff on the Dementia Assessment Unit to explore their workplace culture, examine their values and beliefs about person centred care and make significant improvements to practice. However, practice development is an ongoing process towards increased effectiveness in patient centred care.

Implications for practice:

- Legitimising time out from the work environment to participate in workshops enabled staff to focus attention on their own values and beliefs about dementia care
- Articulating the kind of care staff wished to deliver contributed to agreeing a shared vision for practice
- The approaches used enabled the staff to move beyond 'problems' and engender a belief that it was possible to change practice
- An increase in family satisfaction with dementia care provision is related to the improvements to communication achieved by the project
- The aspiration for a Carers Support Group has yet to be realised and further work with this is ongoing

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstdid=12471>

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