



FoNS Improvement Insights

Good Health for All: Promoting the Physical Health of People with Mental Health Needs

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Project background

Despite the evidence that individuals with chronic mental health problems experience elevated morbidity and mortality rates of preventable diseases, physical health care and health promotion initiatives are not always accessible to people with mental health needs. The role of mental health nurses in improving the physical well-being of service users has been identified by a Chief Nursing Officer's review. However, discussions within the Crisis Assessment and Home Treatment Team (CAHT) revealed that whilst nursing staff are confident about planning care relating to mental health deterioration, they felt out of their depth when discussing the physical health needs of service users.

Aim and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was to improve the physical health screening and health promotion for service users, and offer a physical health check for individuals who had not been seen by a doctor in the last six months. To achieve this aim the objectives of the project were to:

- Benchmark current practice and service provision in relation to physical health screening to identify areas of practice that need to improve
- Clarify the level of need by examining ways to identify and screen service users for physical health/health promotion needs on admission to the CAHT service
- Enable service users to access appropriate physical health/health promotion services and information
- Identify appropriate programmes for service users to access in primary care and the independent sector regarding health promotion
- Promote the well-being and self-esteem of service users
- Improve education of service users and colleagues in primary and secondary care of both physical health and psychiatric medication and its effect
- Develop improved links with health care disciplines to provide ongoing support and continuity of care
- Evaluate and disseminate the work

Key activities and outcomes from the project

An audit of case notes (n=50) revealed most service users had not seen a General Practitioner (GP) or been consulted about their physical health status. This resulted in the development of a physical health and lifestyle questionnaire, trialling a weekly

screening clinic and a workshop for five support time recovery workers (STRWs), that focused on issues relating to the physical health of mental health service users and a proposed approach to the clinic. Challenges posed by the screening clinic were non attendance at booked appointments and acknowledgement that staff did not share the beliefs of the project leaders about the value of physical health screening or, see it as a priority within the overall mental health picture.

Some refocusing to sustain the project included; the development of a questionnaire examining staff views about physical health screening (n=7:28), influencing Trust policy in meeting the physical needs of mental health service users, creation of a multidisciplinary (MDT) steering group and incorporating service user's physical health and life style records into new electronic documentation. An externally facilitated MDT workshop (n=18) was held to explore staff values and beliefs about physical health screening, and create a shared understanding of how this could be realised in line with a new Trust patient pathway protocol that included a standard on a physical health policy. Ongoing discussions influenced agreement on a process to incorporate physical health screening of service users into the CAHT service. Agreed outcomes have been; administrative support in identifying service users that require a health check within 72 hours of admission; the use of a Trust wide health questionnaire; and issues raised by screening are addressed by CAHT doctors or GPs and included in electronic discharge summaries.

Although not all objectives were met relating to identifying and enabling service users to access health promotion services, the project has contributed to a greater awareness in a new Foundation Trust of health screening activities in mental health services that are being built upon.

Implications for practice:

- Sustaining a weekly health screening clinic proved challenging when it became evident that staff did not share the beliefs of the project leaders about the value of physical health screening or recognise it as a mental healthcare priority
- Although service reconfiguration delayed progress of the project, it did provide valuable time for the project leaders to engage with the team and wider stakeholders in raising awareness about physical health screening and health promotion of service users
- An externally facilitated staff workshop proved invaluable to examine staff values, create a shared understanding and provide an impetus to the project

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstdid=18128>

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