



FoNS Improvement Insights

An Action Research Project Exploring the Utility of Rectal Irrigation in Children

Project team: Caroline Sanders, Consultant Nurse Paediatric Urology and Gynaecology, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust; Lucy Bray, Senior Research Fellow CNRU, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust and Edge Hill University; Vicky Doswell, Parent and SCOPE Project Worker; Christine Anderson, Parent; Brenda Hill, Stoma Nurse, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust; Deborah Ward, Children's Community Continence Advisor, Liverpool PCT

Duration of project: September 2010 – November 2011

Keywords: Action research, collaborative health professional working, parental experiences, parent researcher, online questionnaires, rectal irrigation, toolkit

Project background

Little is known about the experiences of parents when they undertake rectal irrigation with their child, or the practices and experience of professionals in recommending this management approach. Issues in the literature that may impact on children and families' experiences of rectal irrigation include the preparation and education of those involved, the ability and enthusiasm to carry out the procedure and the impact the procedure may have on children and young people's developing independence. An action research project was conducted to explore and develop a clinical toolkit aimed at supporting both professionals and parents when a child with neurogenic bowel uses rectal irrigation as their bowel management approach.

Aim and objectives of the project

The project aimed to examine the current professional practice and parental experience of using rectal irrigation with their child in order to develop a clinical toolkit that would:

- Support clinical practice
- Guide education and decision-making in practice
- Integrate and provide information to voluntary organisations
- Support families and empower parents caring for a child with neurogenic bowel

Specific objectives were to explore parents' experiences of using rectal irrigation with their child, examine health professionals' experiences of educating children and young people and explore how parents begin using and manage rectal irrigation as a bowel management approach.

Key activities and outcomes from the project

The action research project with its emphasis on process, personal experience, collaboration and outcome adopted a number of approaches to develop the toolkit and facilitate a change to practice. These included:

- Online professional questionnaire (n=24)
- Parent telephone interview (n=18)

- Action research group evaluation cycle
- Professional (n=13) and parent (n=7) postal evaluation

Throughout the project the action research group was in contact via email or face to face at group meetings, chaired by the lead researcher. In line with the on-going cycle of evaluation, the findings from the qualitative telephone interviews and professional online questionnaires were used to develop the rectal irrigation toolkit (RIT). Although there was a lower than expected response rate to the online professional questionnaire, it identified the value of more educational and support material and identified variations in the way rectal irrigation was managed on different sites. The parental interviews revealed additional issues of assessment, education, support and problem solving and resources, that became key headings when developing the RIT. Evaluation of the RIT (now 4th version) through postal questionnaires was largely positive although there were initial concerns with paper quality and the lack of pictures which were addressed during its development.

The critique of the RIT by parents themselves underpinned the importance that its development was a joint enterprise between both professionals and parents of children involved in rectal irrigation procedures.

Implications for practice:

- Collaborative action research has the potential to develop clinically useful findings that are important within the existing and future health delivery model of information sharing
- Collaboration between the action research team and project members was cited as positive and in particular the role of the lead researcher in ensuring data was collated and fed back to the team and group in a timely fashion
- A range of strategies should be considered to access the views and opinions of a range of professionals working in different contexts
- The parent researcher conducting the telephone interviews gained insight and personal development through the pre-data collection training and participation in the project
- It was helpful to discuss the intellectual property rights for the RIT and the impact on distribution of the final product at an early stage of the project

A full project report including references and copy of the RIT can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstd=24405>

This project was supported by the FoNS Practice Based Development and Research Programme in partnership with the General Nursing Council for England and Wales Trust.