



FoNS Improvement Insights

Improving the Patient Experience of Admission to an Older Persons Acute Mental Health Ward

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Project background

There is general agreement that services for older people with mental health problems in the UK cannot be person-centred without incorporating the views of service users and their carers in all aspects of service planning, development and care delivery. The National Service Framework for Older People supports this view suggesting that older people and their carers should receive person-centred care and services which respect them as individuals and which are arranged around their individual needs. Similarly the National Dementia Strategy for England supports the move towards person-centredness in care and states that all health and social care staff involved in the care of people with dementia require the necessary skills to deliver best quality care. Despite this, there seems to be a paucity of research-based evidence informing staff how admission to an acute mental health setting might best be managed for older people. The driver for the project was a complaint made to the service that identified how family members had been given conflicting information from different team members about the process of admission and the treatment plan.

Aim and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was to improve the patient and family experience of admission to an acute mental health setting for older adults. To achieve this aim, the objectives of the project were to:

- Explore the patient and family experience of admission to the ward and how this contributes to initial and subsequent relationships with nursing staff
- Understand the context of practice and care team's experience, beliefs and values surrounding admission
- Work together as a nursing staff team to improve the patient experience of admission through better partnership working with patients and families

Key activities and outcomes from the project

A number of practice development approaches were used. These included patient/carer questionnaires to explore the patient and family experience with follow up discussions (n=15), a pilot staff survey (n=13), focused staff interviews to gain a

perspective on nursing issues in supporting carers and families on admission (n=10), the Context Assessment Index (CAI) and five facilitated action learning groups (n=6-9). A SWOT analysis was also undertaken during the first action learning group. Disappointingly the poor response to the CAI discounted this as an approach that informed the project.

Despite complex changes within the context of care which compromised the original process, including several changes in ward leadership during the life of the project, a number of outcomes were achieved.

Once the family, carer and nursing team questionnaires had been completed, regular action learning groups involving the nursing staff were started with the aim of exploring further ways in which families and carers could be better supported by the team. The nursing team viewed this as a productive way to discuss ideas and to promote communication as a team. The action learning groups were initially used to reflect on the process and experience of patient admission, but as the project progressed the groups were also used to generate ideas and action for change and to develop practice. For example; an information resource was developed to enable staff to provide support and guide families and carers to additional services across the locality. Additionally, family and carer drop-in sessions were introduced to provide protected time to focus on issues faced by the families and carers of patients admitted to the ward. Similar schemes are now envisaged for other wards across the Trust to promote partnership working between the nursing team and to support service users and their families.

Implications for practice:

- The project team needed to be flexible and persistent to engage with and gain the views of patients, their families, carers and staff
- The approaches used enabled increased staff awareness of the need to extend the service offered beyond a focus on patients and their needs, to one that includes the families and carers that support them at home
- Whilst the project achieved a number of positive outcomes, changes within the context of care impacted on the facilitation of its focus and progress. The creation of a stakeholder group to enable early and regular engagement with key stakeholders and managers of the ward may have helped to promote the project and encourage staff involvement

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstdid=26952>

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