

Communication And Respect for people with Dementia: Student learning (CARDS): A means to develop dementia friendly communities.

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Introduction

The greatest risk factor for dementia is age, and an age friendly community in which people with dementia are understood and treated is crucial. The Alzheimer's Society (2013) suggests that a dementia friendly community requires inclusiveness and support to encourage independence and facilitate choice for people with dementia and their carers. One starting point is a health and social care work force with knowledge and awareness of dementia. Reports by our health and social care students suggested they felt unprepared to work with people with dementia on qualifying. Lack of dementia education is widespread in Higher Education and prompted the Communication And Respect for people with Dementia: Student learning (CARDS) project.

Aims

This project aimed to improve students' preparedness for working with people with dementia spreading knowledge and awareness across their communities.

Method

The CARDS project was developed after critical synthesis of evidence to identify current best practice. This review informed CARDS, a two part learning package; a programme comprising online resources and class based sessions and a care home experience, an opportunity for students to interact with people with dementia using reminiscence cards. CARDS was piloted with physiotherapy and learning disability nursing students.

Results

A dementia knowledge questionnaire was developed. Students' confidence and perceived competence was also assessed. Findings showed a significant improvement in knowledge scores ($p < .001$) ($n=46$) and confidence and perceived competence after the introductory programme ($p < .001$) ($n=46$) and after the care home experience there was a significant improvement in confidence and perceived competence ($p = .017$) ($n=13$).

Conclusion

Students reported that both elements of CARDS will be useful when working with people with dementia and that their attitudes had become more positive. CARDS was modified after evaluation and is being implemented across other health and social care programmes in our institution. More evidence based pre-qualifying education on dementia for health and social care professionals is needed to enhance care as an important step towards developing dementia friendly communities.