

Staff-resident communication practices

strategies for enhancement

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Aims of the project

- explore staff attitudes and communication practices and identify any institutional barriers to communication
- develop a resources kit for staff, accreditation teams and families, either a booklet or other
- organise experiential/interactive workshop programs to complement the resource
- evaluate the impact of the resource kit and the workshop programs



Methods (i)

- Recruit 4 residential care facilities, both high and low care, and including at least one non-metropolitan facility
- Survey staff for:
 - views of their current practice/problems
 - staff development and communication training programs
 - perceptions of barriers to communication with residents, both environmental and social



Methods (ii)

- Conduct focus groups and /or interviews (10 to 15 staff, including the Unit Manager)
 - communication issues
 - social needs of old people
 - strategies for extending opportunities for communication with residents
- Observation and mapping of routines and practices



Methods (iii)

- Feedback with explanation and suggestions for overcoming any barriers identified
- Development and dissemination of training/education materials
- Delivery of training workshops



Methods (iv)*

- Review of practice 2-3 months after training, with a repeat of the staff survey and sampling interviews with 3-4 staff in each facility
- Review of resident perceptions of quality of life with a repeat of the pre-intervention survey



Barriers to communication

- Noise
 - an intrusive P/A system
 - shared sound areas - TV, activities, sitting and eating all in same Open Plan area
 - noisy dishwashers in dining areas
- Other observations
 - some staff appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of dementia
 - some volunteers used patronising language
 - low staff to resident ratio, but a reality in this environment



Staff resource package

- Resource booklet – 16 pages
- Training materials for two 90 minute workshops
 - PowerPoint presentations
 - facilitator's notes
 - handouts





Contents - Staff Resource Booklet

1. Background - The role of communication in residential aged care
2. What is communication?
3. Social and communication needs of residents
4. Staff-resident relationships
5. Communication in the residential setting: issues to consider



Contents (ii)

6. Strategies for meeting different communication needs

- Language barriers – residents from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Hearing impairment
- Speech impairment
- Visual impairment
- Dementia



Project benefits (i)

- slowly developing confidence of staff
- staff awareness appears to have been raised throughout the project activities
- the increase in the number of responses to the second survey suggests an increased willingness to engage with the aims of the project
- expected benefits for residents from all of the above



Project benefits (ii)

Staff have also benefited from:

- recognition of the good work they do in spite of the many challenges they face
- the opportunity to have their concerns highlighted



Reflections on findings

Complicating factors in estimating the impact of the project:

- staff turnover (including several changes at manager level in two of the facilities)
- part-time staff employment
- changing work shifts
- heavy staff workloads, and family and second-job commitments.



Staff recruitment

Need for compensatory research strategies

- more time in face-to-face recruitment
- more time at facility **before** attempts to formally recruit staff (observation phase should come before survey)
- less formal ways of capturing staff perceptions
- simpler, less-intimidating consent forms consent forms
- shorter tools – survey didn't take long to complete but it looked long



The balancing act

You know, I just hope that no one's on the floor in the other room. You know, you've got to sit with them, you've got to talk them through it.

Yeah, you've got to give them time, you really do, and just hope that the other staff member's in there fixing up whoever's, whatever's happened with the buzzer. You've just got to be with them, stay with them I think.

(Personal Care Assistant)



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