

Monday 15 February, 2016

Briefing on an Evidence for Change Project for Wellbeing of Care Home Residents

This briefing is to inform colleagues and partner organisations on a research project in Lancashire to improve wellbeing by engaging care home residents in meaningful activity. The project took place as part of an Evidence for Change Programme with the National Institute of Health Research Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care North West Coast (NIHR CLAHRC NWC).

The project is an excellent example of co-production. It demonstrates the benefits of engaging with and empowering customers from the outset in developments, emphasises wellbeing, provides an approach to share with other care homes and health and care settings and is a positive, heart-warming story of what can be achieved working as equals.

Background

In 2014/15 County Council Commissioners worked with East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust (ELHT) Occupational Therapists. This was to better understand the types of activity taking place in residential care homes for older people and the value and meaningfulness of the activity. Other multi-agency work led by the county council was in progress to reduce ambulance call outs from care homes and towards wider care home quality improvement.

The NIHR CLAHRC NWC brings universities, local authorities, NHS organisations and the public together to accelerate the translation of research findings into health service improvements and changes that will reduce health inequalities and improve population health. One of their thematic work streams is Evidence for Change including a pilot programme of workshops and support to carry out research involving patient participation.

A cross-organisation project team from Lancashire came together led by Public Health and Wellbeing Managers from the county council working with an Occupational Therapist from ELHT, a resident and the Manager/Proprietor of Marsden Grange Residential Home and with links to East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group (ELCCG). They submitted a successful application to the NIHR CLARHC NWC Evidence for Change programme with the intention of investigating how opportunities to engage in meaningful activity within a residential care home for older people can improve residents' mental wellbeing.

Achievements

Over eight months in 2015 the team undertook an initial qualitative study that provided learning and lived experience evidence to form a more in-depth and wider quality improvement initiative. They attended five workshops, regularly met and worked together.

At the outset the team met with residents, some family members and staff to gain consent for the project and this in itself let to residents talking about their interests and reminiscing. Pictures were obtained from archives and active discussion followed on between residents.

The resident representative from Marsden Grange was integral to the development, direction and delivery of the project. His involvement led to the development of a "boundary object" - one or more objects/articles that can be used to stimulate conversation and develop

interpersonal relationships. This was a simple pictorial survey that enabled the resident to initiate conversations with other residents, find areas of common interest and shared experiences including previous profession, hobbies or memories of the local area. It enabled him to connect with other residents. This was to inform what activities would be meaningful to residents however it quickly became clear that the process he devised was in itself a meaningful activity and encouraged residents to connect and interact more.

The team decided to redefine the hypothesis and alter their investigation in order to understand how resident designed boundary objects could be utilised in residential care homes for older people to encourage or enable more participation in meaningful activities.

Knowledge gained about residents enabled them to be involved more in the daily life of the care home. For example, suggesting menus or recipes, washing up and handing out post.

Feedback from residents and staff at Marsden Grange has been positive. Their involvement in the research project has enabled participation in workshops, group meetings, interviews and other interactions that have led to an improved sense of wellbeing and connectivity.

In order to summarise and present the work NIHR CLAHRC NWC worked with the team to produce an academic poster and a film titled the "The Way we were...Now!" The title was chosen by the resident to highlight how older people should be seen in the light of them as individuals, their life experience and to be given the opportunity to continue to doing activities or hobbies that mean something to them in their daily lives. Making the film involved many residents and enabled the resident representative to see his ideas reach fruition. It has been showcased at a number of partnership events and shared widely by NIHR CLAHRC NWC.

Lessons learned

The NIHR CLAHRC NWC Evidence for Change Programme has enabled two LCC officers to increase their knowledge and skills in respect of undertaking research, presenting and reporting findings and evaluating outcomes. The tools are being shared for wider quality improvement.

The project enabled a cross-organisation team to work together outside of the constraints of organisational boundaries and as equal partners to improve outcomes for residents. This approach improved understanding of different perspectives and all felt the benefit of this.

Integral to the success of the activity was the involvement of the resident representative throughout the entire process to co-produce, design, deliver and evaluate the project. The extent to which this shaped the project and how in future initiatives the assets, skills, life experience and time of representatives should be encouraged and utilised was recognised.

The programme intended to evidence an improvement in mental wellbeing (using a short version of a Wellbeing Scale) and a reduction in falls however the resident driven activity took off before obtaining a baseline measure. This is to be avoided if repeating the research.

The hypothesis changed as a result of developmental evaluation and learning. The positive impact observed and other findings will inform further care home improvement work. This includes that relationships and opportunities for residents to connect meaningfully with one another can be the foundation stone for wellbeing initiatives in residential care settings.

Looking ahead

The NIHR CLAHRC NWC Team are evaluating their Evidence for Change programme and have conducted one formal focus group with LCC Officers involved in this activity and interviewed the Head of Service for Patient Safety Quality Improvement. A second focus group is planned with the lead resident representative, other residents and the wider team who participated in the project activity and final film that the NIHR CLAHRC NWC kindly enabled to be made.

The approach used is being written up to be shared as good practice with other care home providers and partners alongside the film. It is hoped to raise awareness and encourage person centred approaches and emphasis on individuals, meaningful activity and wellbeing.

Colleagues leading in adult safeguarding at the county council and ELCCG are discussing next steps with NIHR CLAHRC NWC for intentions to gain support from colleagues across Lancashire to introduce the activity at multiple sites and run a formal research programme. This will be to more effectively measure change in mental wellbeing and impact.

The team intend to evidence how the introduction of boundary objects and other wellbeing and patient safety tools including "mindfulness" and "safety huddles" can be introduced in residential care homes for older people to achieve a reduction in safeguarding alerts made in respect of incidents between residents. The numbers of alerts remain statistically high across residential care homes for older people throughout Lancashire and the narrative behind alerts tells us that these incidents often involve the same residents.

It is intended to test out whether incidents will reduce if residents have more opportunities to build better relationships (using resident designed boundary objects to enable residents to engage meaningfully and positively with one another) and whether staff practicing mindfulness will be better able to diffuse and avoid challenging situations between residents.

Recommendations

1. That the approach used at Marsden Grange is written up and shared as good practice
2. That the research is repeated with clear measures to evidence improvement in wellbeing and impact towards reducing pressures on the health and care system
3. That the county council and partners including NIHR CLAHRC NWC, health colleagues and providers explore how further work with residents can reduce safeguarding alerts
4. That learning from the project and follow on work is incorporated into the current county council led Care Home Quality Assurance and Improvement Board Programme
5. That the principles of co-production and service user involvement and empowerment be an integral part of future service planning and design from the outset and throughout
6. That opportunities to collaborate with providers of services to vulnerable adults be sought in order to promote, encourage and implement evidence based quality improvements
7. That the county council continue to support officer involvement in NIHR CLAHRC NWC in order to accelerate the implementation of evidence based learning into practice

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To view the film "The Way we were.....Now!" please visit: <https://youtu.be/rCKjetAuIKQ>