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Quarter 1 2021/22 RUNNER-UP

#400WORDS: COVID-19 RESPONSE

Meaningful activities on an acute older people's ward

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Background

When acutely unwell people living with dementia are admitted to hospital, symptoms of delirium and confusion can be ignored or misunderstood (Briggs *et al.*, 2016). Meaningful activities can support engagement and recovery. They are activities that are significant for the person; reflecting interests, routines, habits, and roles that are adjusted to someone's abilities (Travers *et al.*, 2016). Having a person-centred approach minimises behaviours that challenge, ensuring a stay in hospital is positive and discharge is timely (Fitzpatrick, 2022). In September 2019, Meaningful Activity Coordinators (MACs) were recruited to work on the acute older people's wards in the hospital.

Method

The MACs created an area where patients could sit at a table together for meals and to provide a therapeutic environment for reminiscence activity and music. Getting to know the individual patient and tailor activities to them and their routines was central to the MAC role. The team introduced a robotic cat to the ward, which patients could stroke. This had a calming and therapeutic effect on even the most distressed patients. Alongside the introduction of MAC teams, all staff participated in enhanced care training for people with dementia, delirium and behaviours that challenge (often leading to falls). Everyone developed new skills to meet the needs of patients living with dementia in an acute care setting.

Results

In addition to improving patient experience, the introduction of meaningful activities has led to a reduction in numbers of falls. Providing meaningful engagement with patients who may otherwise be wandering and at risk of falling has prevented falls. The ward has witnessed a 43% reduction in number of falls in the first six months of the MAC team working on the ward.

The MAC team have responded the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic whilst positively improving the service they provide in the hospital (see Covid-19 postscript below).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence-based practice of meaningful activity in an acute hospital ward for older people has had a positive effect on patients living with dementia in particular.

References

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Covid-19 Postscript

During the Covid-19 pandemic the meaningful activities team had to adapt the way they engaged patient in activities. Previously patients enjoyed sitting round a table; socialising, chatting and joining in activities together, but due to the social distancing measures in place patients could no longer sit together. Patients who were living with dementia found this difficult to understand and sought social engagement opportunities despite the restrictions. The MAC team had to rethink how to continue the positive engagement they had learnt and how to still foster a social type of environment. By carrying out activities in the four-bedded bays where social distancing could be maintained, patients could enjoy quizzes, music therapy and access technology (e.g., iPads) to make that vital connection and communicate with families and loved ones. The team had to think about resources used having single use purpose much more, ensuring adherence to Infection Control guidelines.

New facemask wearing rules brought another challenge with communication. Patients found it difficult to understand staff and therefore did not engage so well in activities. The use of clear masks so that patients could visibly see staff's faces and be able to communicate more effectively worked well for some but for others the MAC team needed to use written communication boards.

The MAC team continue to adapt to changes and positively improving the service they provide in the hospital.



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