

Improving hospital care of people with dementia

Ideas for managers on education



People with dementia may have a memory span of 30 seconds, and may forget why they are in your hospital. They may try to find a familiar face or place, by walking out. Improving care for people with dementia is about cultural change, continuing education and involving families and carers.

Here are some ideas for you to consider in educating your hospital staff to care for patients with dementia. These ideas may suit some hospitals better than others.

Base your education program on assessed local needs and priorities...

building on previous work.

- Some facilities have implemented a range of educational and policy initiatives for dementia care and management; others are less advanced. Systematic gathering of information on training needs can promote greater awareness of the needs of the patient with dementia and their carers, and current care and management shortcomings.

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service has developed, in collaboration with the local Division of General Practice, an education session for visiting Medical Officers which attracts Continuing Medical Education points.

Plan dementia education...

in consultation with both staff and carers.

- Staff concerns or issues can be addressed in the training, and staff participation in training increased. Carers of patients with dementia bring a distinctive perspective and insights into the behaviour and needs of the patients, and are a valuable resource.
- Organise high quality professional presentations addressing the reality of the participants' work situation.

Draw on existing expertise and resources...

in dementia education.

- There is a great deal of expertise in dementia education in some hospitals, and in organisations such as Alzheimer's Australia Vic (AAV), the Cognitive Dementia and Memory Services (CDAMS), and the Validation Therapy Resource & Training Centre. Much of their material is relevant and readily adaptable to hospitals.

Address staff knowledge and skills, and the role of carers...

relating to dementia care.

- Address factual knowledge about dementia and other causes of cognitive impairment, and the development of skills in communicating and working effectively with patients who have dementia or other cognitive impairments.
- Address the role of carers in the care of dementia patients.

Encourage whole-of-facility training...

for all staff likely to come into contact with patients with dementia: clinical, direct care and non-direct care.

- All staff need to have a basic understanding of dementia, its impact on patient behaviour, and implications for effective interaction and communication with patients. Dementia education, awareness and support for non-clinical staff such as porters, maintenance staff, and cleaners are appropriate and effective.

Ballarat Health Services conducts education sessions easily understood by all disciplines, both clinical and non-clinical, across the hospital.

Develop resources, and provide other post-training support and reinforcement...

- Face-to-face training needs to be supported by subsequent access to related resources in the form of brochures, manuals or on-line material, and appropriately skilled resource persons who can support staff in the ward.

Ballarat Health Services has developed a bookmark listing ways to communicate with people with dementia in hospital, and to support education messages. The hospital uses their Medical Officers Orientation Handbook to explain and promote the use of their Cognitive Impairment Identifier (CII).

- Identify an individual who is readily accessible, can reinforce the skills acquired in training, and can advise on management of specific issues as they arise, to support the maintenance of training effects. Staff with particular expertise or knowledge in dementia should be identified as resources or 'champions' in each setting, and for each staffing group.
- Build in capacity for impromptu education sessions for ward staff, focusing, for example, on the care of particular patients manifesting agitated behaviours.

Seek qualified and experienced trainers...

with expertise in working with patients with dementia, to conduct face-to-face training.

- The impact of training is related to the perceived expertise and credibility of the trainer. For nurses in particular, practical advice for responding effectively to patients manifesting symptoms of dementia, and taking account of the realities of their workplace, is highly valued.

This sheet is one of a four-part series, Improving hospital care of people with dementia. See also 'Ideas for managers on culture change', 'Ideas for staff' and 'Ideas for supporting carer relationships'. Full evaluation report and 'Ideas' series available at www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/

Develop a flexibly organised curriculum...

packaged to facilitate delivery in varied length sessions, and for different staff groupings, and readily repeatable.

- The reality of hospital work practices means that many staff are available for training for only short periods of time, and these times vary according to shifts and other work contingencies. Training also needs to be repeated to meet needs of a changing workforce.

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service places education sessions on the hospital intranet, and reviews resource material as part of the hospital's quality processes.



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