

Communication care plans – what does ‘good’ look like?

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Project aim — Improve the quality of communication care plans for service users

Background

At the beginning of this project, the picture in Hampshire was one of varied quality in communication care plans that care providers had in place for their service users. This meant that the communication needs of adults with learning disabilities were not reliably being met. There was no consistent approach in measuring the quality of a communication care plan and Speech and Language Therapy would regularly receive referrals to assess how individuals could communicate.

This was despite two pieces of documentation that are available to support service users’ communication needs. These are:

- the 5 Good Communication Standards produced by the RCSLT in response to the Winterbourne View report - each standard provides information to inform organisations of what ‘good’ looks like.
- the Accessible Information Standard -all organisations that provide NHS or adult social care must follow the accessible information standard by law, to ensure that people can receive their care in a format they understand and with the communication support that best suits them.

From the above outline I proposed this project - to improve the quality of communication care plans and ensure service users’ expressive communication and understanding were better supported. As I am co-located with Adult services colleagues who carry out reviews of service users’ packages of care, including communication care plans, this seemed a good opportunity to work with them, with the intention of providing a more consistent approach in measuring the quality of communication care plans.

Design

My starting point for this piece of work was to devise a questionnaire for Adult services colleagues. This design was used as it was evident that a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach would be beneficial to determine a baseline in order to investigate:

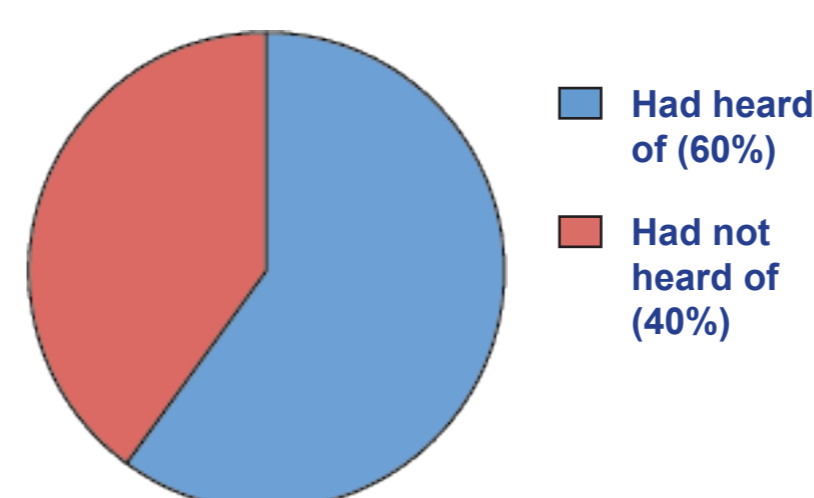
- my colleagues’ current practice in relation to what a good communication care plan looks like
- their understanding and application of the 5 Good Communication Standards and Accessible Information Standard
- their understanding and skills in relation to a range of communication strategies

Responses from this questionnaire would shape what needed to be put in place to support good quality communication care plans and to support my colleagues’ current awareness, skills and knowledge.

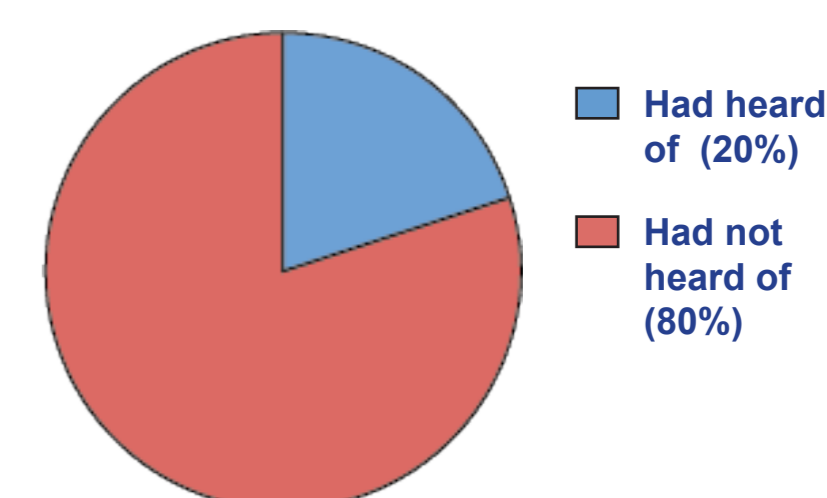
This baseline questionnaire was devised and delivered in the summer of 2017. Training was implemented to increase skills, knowledge and practice and then the questionnaire was re-submitted after a 3 month period, to all 22 colleagues who had attended the training.

Examples of baseline information

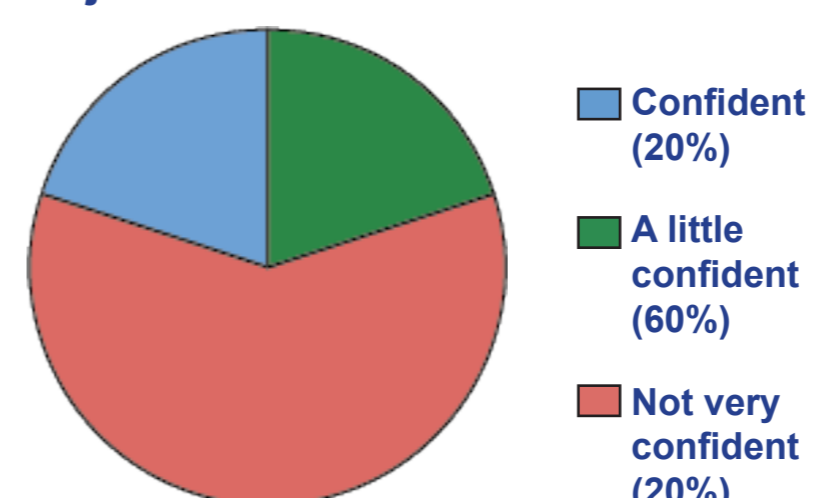
Awareness of the 5 Good Communication Standards



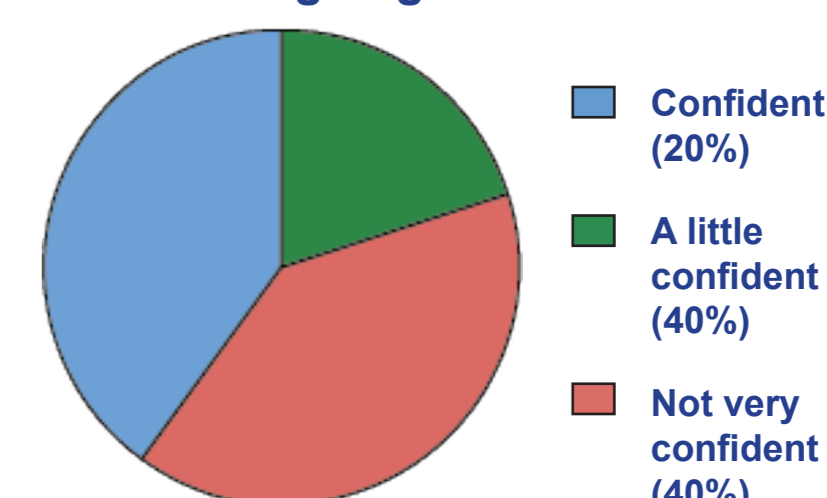
Awareness of the Accessible Information Standard



Understanding of objects of reference



Awareness of Makaton signing



The Five Good Communication Standards
(RCSLT, 2013)

- 1 — There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals.
- 2 — Services demonstrate how they support individuals to be involved with decisions about their care and services.
- 3 — Staff value and use the best approaches to communication with each individual.
- 4 — Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate.
- 5 — Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing.



What good looks like
(RCSLT, 2013)

- 1 — Communication passport/ Communication chart
- 2 — Talking mats
- 3 — Signing, communication books, objects of reference
- 4 — Menu choices, choice boards
- 5 — Hospital passport, mealtime mat

What changes occurred

From the baseline questionnaire it was evident that there was originally limited understanding of The 5 Good Communication Standards and the Accessible Information Standard as well as a varied understanding on a range of communication strategies. I then offered communication training as drop in sessions for staff. The sessions were grouped into:

- Symbolic understanding and visual support ideas
- 5 Good Communication Standards
- Accessible Information Standards
- Easy Read and links for AIS
- Makaton essential signs

In return I asked each colleague who attended to answer one question. The question was: ‘From your current practice, and following this training, what prompts would benefit you when completing a service user’s review, to provide a consistent approach in measuring what a good communication care plan looks like?’. Every participant generated ideas, without any input from myself.

I attended a team meeting so that together with the team we ranked the prompts to finalise the top 5 key prompts which could be added to the review paperwork under the communication section. The top five ranked prompts were as follows:

1. How best to communicate with the service user
2. How does the service user communicate – list all the ways
3. What is the best way to support a service user’s understanding
4. How does the service user express pain, anxiety and enjoyment
5. Who knows the service user well to help them communicate

It is hoped that this will enable a more consistent approach in discussing a service user’s communication care plan with the care provider, and ensure there is a deeper understanding of what ‘good’ looks like.

The questionnaires were completed 3 months after the baseline surveys were carried out. As hypothesised, there was evidence that there was increased awareness of the standards, increased knowledge and greater understanding of the importance of these documents to effectively support service users with communication needs.

Next Steps

From this piece of work, these prompts are being raised with the service manager to have the list added to the electronic review paperwork, but currently colleagues have it available in paper form. In addition to this change, there have been three other key developments which have arisen from this project.

- 1) Professional’s prompt sheet
When looking at the list of prompts which had been proposed by Adult services colleagues, there were a series of prompts which the team all felt naturally fell into a ‘professional prompts’ list, in preparation for going out to review a service user’s package of care. They included the need to find out in what format a service user would like their invite letter (utilising the Accessible Information Standard), a grabsheet about the different communication strategies, and a reminder of the 5 Good Communication Standards and what good looks like for each. A bookmark has been created for colleagues and these can also be shared more widely with care providers, which promotes the 5 Good Communication Standards across services and embeds it more successfully, as was intended by the RCSLT. A grabsheet is currently being created by Speech and Language Therapy, which again can be shared widely to promote inclusive communication across services.
- 2) Development of other health domains on the review paperwork
The cycles of this project can be used again to investigate key prompts that may be beneficial for other health sections on the review paperwork, for example eating and drinking or epilepsy, in order to support colleagues in consistently ensuring these care plans are also of a good quality.
- 3) 5 Good Communication Standards at a procurement level
Most excitedly, colleagues have suggested that these standards could be used to determine the appropriateness of a care provider at the point of procurement, especially where a service user has communication needs that require specialised communication strategies.

It has inspired me to realise that with a shared purpose a lot can be achieved and ultimately awareness of these standards could help improve the quality of support for adults with learning disabilities, enabling people to more readily achieve their dreams and aspirations.

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