

Improving Support and Engagement with Carers in a Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU)

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1. Background

Carers UK estimate that there are 8.8 million carers in the UK, and 3 in 5 people will become a carer in their lifetime. (1) A carer is anyone who provides unpaid care for a friend or relative who due to illness or disability cannot cope without their support. Due to the potential risk to their own mental health (2) and the benefits to patients whose relatives are involved in their treatment, (3,4) carers of those with mental illness are an essential group to target in terms of support and engagement.

2. Aim

To make a significant increase in the level of support and engagement with carers in contact with Hawthorns 1 Ward, Parklands Hospital by December 2020.

3. Project Design

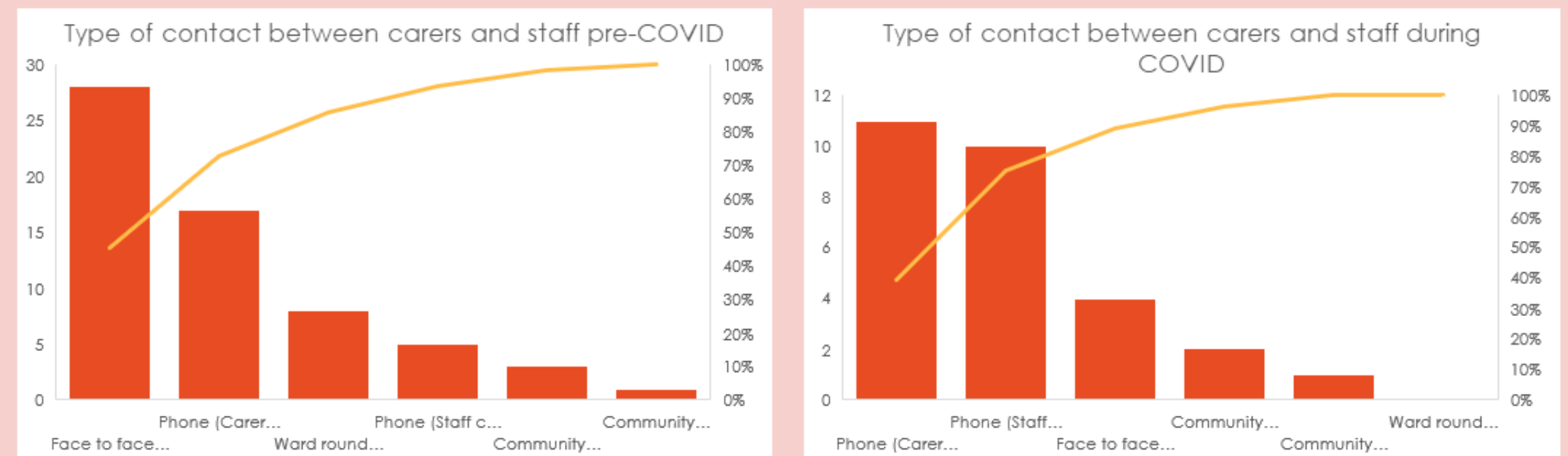
- Step 1: Establish the current situation in the trust and wider services
- Step 2: Identify team and start initial work
- Step 3: Identifying and testing changes
- Step 4: Evaluating changes
- Step 5: Sharing findings more widely

4. Examples of Changes Tested

- Carer booklets -> paper/electronic copies
- Ward round -> phone vs video, patients inviting their relatives, separate carer/staff meetings
- Carers groups -> local and trust wide set up, guest speakers, breathing exercise
- Discharge medications -> providing information leaflets with medication boxes

5. Effect of COVID-19

Using the 10 last patients method, we compared the types of contact between carers and staff in samples of patients admitted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Prior to the first lockdown, most contact occurred when carers visited their loved one on the ward. Since the first lockdown was initiated, the majority of the contact is happening by phone.

6. Results

"I'm not a carer, I'm a sister. But I care because I'm a sister"

Quotes from carers attending online support groups, with themes related to communication, and benefits from attending a support group

"It's a huge weight off my shoulders knowing there is someone to go to"

"This is my time, my time to talk to you lot and hear what you're going through too"

"The battle of finding out what's going on"

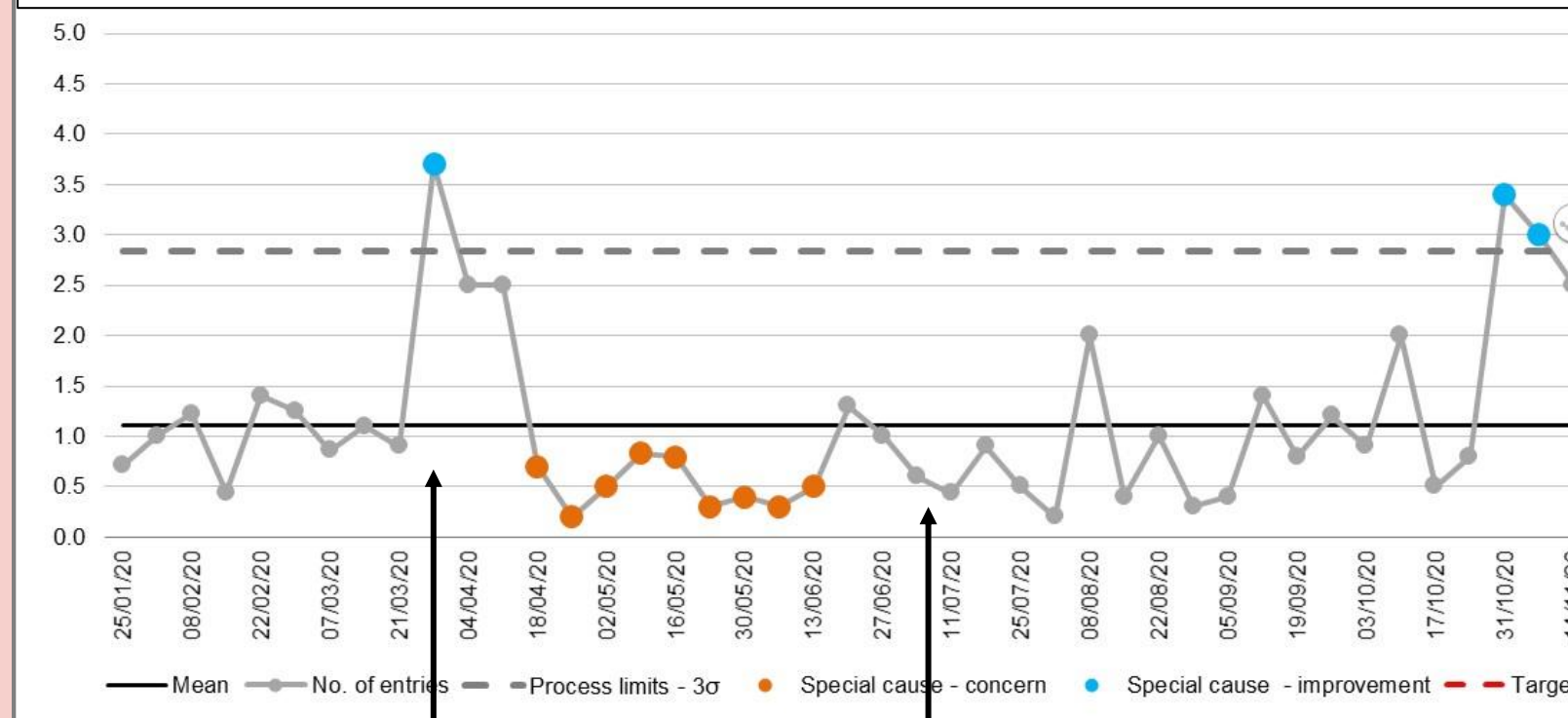
"Zoom has opened up the isolation"

Supported Stressed Pleased Scared Worried Safe Freedom Relief Informed

Words used to describe carer emotions during admission, gathered by questionnaire. Proportional frequency illustrated by size of font.

The results show the impact of COVID-19 on contact between staff and carers, and how adaptations have brought the average back to pre-pandemic times on the ward, with an **overall upward trend from Sept – Nov. Positive feedback** has been received for the support groups, and we need to consider **impact on ward round timings**.

Mean no. of contacts between staff and carers by week for H1 ward



Outcome – Carer emotions during admission

Average length of ward round
With carers: 62
Without carers: 20

Process – No. of contacts with staff and carers

Balance – Length of ward round

Measures

7. Sustainability

- Project to be packaged up for the next trainee joining in Feb 2020
- Carers and Carers Lead Network established in the trust, with regular meetings to share ideas and examples of good practice across teams
- Personal learning about QI and carers that I will carry forward through my career

8. Lessons Learnt

- COVID restrictions have impacted how staff, carers and patients interact, which affects carer experience of admissions
- Difficulty making changes stick in an unstable environment, but importance of adapting and maintaining engagement, and the value of peer support for carers
- Family networks vary hugely, so a flexible, person-centred approach is vital
- Anyone can become a carer, so we must consider how we would want to be treated in that situation

Acknowledgements

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References

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