



summary

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Acute awareness

Improving hospital care for people with dementia

Dementia currently affects over half a million people in England alone; this number is set to rise considerably as more people live longer.

Sixty thousand deaths a year are directly attributable to dementia, and the current cost to the NHS is estimated at £1.3 billion a year. While this figure is the current estimate, it is probable that the actual cost is higher because many people are undiagnosed.

Recent government policy has reflected a growing awareness of the importance of dementia care, with the publication of the first national dementia strategy being followed by increased funding and the appointment of a national clinical director for dementia. Despite these and other efforts there is still scope for improving services. At a time when cost savings are being keenly sought alongside service improvements, this could also lead to significant efficiency savings.

Hospital trusts are a key area where the NHS can achieve such savings and improve quality of care. The NHS Confederation's report, *Acute awareness: improving hospital care for people with dementia*, looks at ways in which acute trusts can provide high-quality care for patients with dementia.

Hospital care

Almost two-thirds of general and acute hospital beds are used by people over 65. Although not all older people have dementia, the number with the condition is substantial, and a significant number of people under 60 years old also have dementia.

Taking into account the high number of people with dementia who use hospital services and the fact that this number is increasing rapidly, it makes sense for hospitals to rethink the way they provide services. *Acute awareness* highlights how hospitals can improve the quality and efficiency of acute care for people with dementia. It showcases the innovative work that both NHS trusts and cross-agency partnerships are undertaking.

Improving efficiency and quality of care for patients with dementia can go hand in hand by, for example:

- reducing the length of stay: the Alzheimer's Society estimates that the length of stay for patients with dementia can be longer than for other patients, and has called for the average length of stay to be reduced by a week
- reduce readmissions by ensuring people leave hospital with an appropriate care plan
- reduce infection cases, which are linked to length of stay
- reduce complaints by improving care for the patient
- improve staff satisfaction by providing them with the skills to respond appropriately to the needs of patients.

Key areas to deliver high-quality care

Identification

50 per cent of dementia in general hospital is unrecognised. Early identification in hospitals is essential to effective care planning and can lead to improved outcomes for the patient, as it reduces the likelihood of that patient's physical and mental health worsening during their stay. The NAO argues

that effective identification of patients with dementia at admission, together with more proactive, coordinated management of their care and discharge, could produce savings of between £64 million and £102 million a year nationally.

Care pathways

Once the patient has been identified as having dementia, it is important to ensure they have an appropriate care plan. Moreover, people with dementia are usually admitted to hospital for another reason. It is important to check how the dementia care pathway can link into the pathways of these conditions.

Training

Various reports have found a concerning low level of dementia awareness among hospital staff. Increased training can lead to improved identification and effective management of dementia.

The use of antipsychotic drugs

Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and hospital managers can help to ensure that only those who can benefit from the use of antipsychotic drugs receive them. This can be done by ensuring that there is a rigorous needs assessment, both for those patients with dementia who were receiving antipsychotic drugs before being admitted to hospital as well as patients who are going to be prescribed with antipsychotic drugs while in hospital.

Nutrition

Age carries a significant risk of malnutrition. As four out of ten people admitted to hospital have malnutrition on arrival, trusts can play a big role in identifying malnutrition by screening patients when they are admitted. However, not all malnourishment happens before a patient is admitted to hospital and so it is important for hospitals to provide meals that fit the dietary needs of the patient and to ensure that patients have the necessary support to eat them.

Environment

Changes will lead to more dignity and privacy for patients.

There are also links to patient safety and improved health outcomes. Simple improvements could include a social area, signage, or easy-to-read information.

Effective discharge

Dementia is a predictor of a higher probability of inappropriate or delayed discharge. Reviewing the process and auditing readmissions associated with dementia are an important part of ensuring high performance in this area.

Leadership

A senior clinician leading on quality improvement in dementia can help to improve the knowledge of dementia within the hospital, develop a care pathway, liaise with teams to promote dignity, strengthen partnership working and be a champion for dementia at both strategic and operational level.

Liaison teams

The NHS Confederation published a briefing, *Healthy mind, healthy body*, in 2009, showing how liaison with psychiatry teams can improve care, both for dementia sufferers and people with other mental health problems. The Public Accounts Committee's report on dementia services called for liaison teams to be available in every hospital. We also showed how liaison teams could bring cost savings by reducing length of stay and re-attendances.

Involvement of patients and carers

Listening to patients and their carers and engaging with them in a meaningful way is key to treating patients with dignity and compassion. Patients and carers can be involved in the day-to-day care of the patient, in designing the individual care plan and in strategic decisions.

Please visit www.nhsconfed.org/publications to download a copy of *Acute awareness: improving hospital care for people with dementia*. For more information, please contact Patricia Suarez, senior policy and research officer at patricia.suarez@nhsconfed.org

Further copies or alternative formats can be requested from:
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