The ‘fresh eyes’ approach to improve experience of care: improving acute hospital care for patients who may be in their last months of life

The Emergency Care Improvement Programme’s (ECIP) End of Life Care Project aimed to improve care for patients who may be in their last months of life with a particular focus on the lens of acute hospital admissions. A key component of our approach included a “fresh eyes” perspective on the experiences of care with a “walk through” of a potential patient / relative’s journey.

Caring for people who are dying, death, and bereavement is an everyday occurrence in an acute hospital; we have only one chance to get this right. With around 50% of all deaths in the UK occurring in hospital every year it is important that hospitals provide good quality of care for dying patients and those important to them.

The ‘fresh eyes’ review of a potential patient journey

The ‘fresh eyes’ method provides a focused review of a patient / relative’s journey through an acute hospital by a small team who deliberately use their sense of sight, hearing, smell and feeling from their own unique perspectives. The method is an adaptation of the ‘Fifteen Steps Challenge: Quality from a Patient’s Perspective’. The adaptations were co-designed with experts with lived experience to ensure appropriate adjustment for use in this sensitive topic area.

The walk through starts from the hospital car park, through Accident and Emergency departments (A&E), short stay acute admissions, wards, public areas, mortuary and bereavement services. It is led by an expert team with nominated staff from the hospital.

The programme evaluation showed the approach was effective and added value to the hospitals teams for the following reasons:

- Expertise and independence of the team – person with personal experience of the death of a family member within an acute hospital and professionals with a background in end of life care quality improvement across the whole system.
- Participation of hospital staff in the walkthrough to personally experience the hospital through a different perspective from their professional role.
- Preparation – planning with the acute hospital team helped everyone to be prepared and maximise the potential benefits.
• Support for the expert lay-members of the team in the event the walkthrough may trigger distressing emotions / memories.
• Immediate feedback on the same day to the hospital team.
• A balanced written report within two weeks of the walkthrough highlighting what was good practice and potential considerations for improvement.

**Outcomes**

Many of the observations from the walkthroughs identified a number of easily resolved issues but have a big impact, for example dirty windows cobwebs and plain corridors on the way to bereavement suite – a little resource can have a big impact. The method also identified bigger areas for improvement in some hospitals such as the mortuary visiting suite. The walkthrough provided an opportunity to highlight best practice from the ‘healing environment Kings Fund Project’ either reinforcing pre-existing best practice or providing information.

**Key learning**

• Consider easy access to information leaflets for families and friends of patients who are seriously ill with practical information about where to get food / drink, any special car parking dispensation etc.
• Ensure signage is clear for visitors who may be distressed.
• Consider the physical needs of patients and carers. Are there seats on long corridors where the patient and carer can rest?
• Consider the environment and language associated with the mortuary visiting areas. Are the colours neutral? Are there pictures? Is natural light available? Would you want to visit or view your loved one?
• Consider the arrangements for supporting a full range of faiths and spiritual care.
• Is car parking available for visitors whose relatives are in A&E?
Further information from the ECIP End of Life Care Project guides

- Rapid Improvement Guide to: care for patients who may be in their last months of life.
- ECIP End of Life Care Summary Evaluation Report and Learning.

Access at: https://www.hospiceuk.org/ecip

National resources and policy context

Kings Fund website resources:

- ‘Fifteen Steps Challenge: Quality from a Patient’s Perspective’
- ‘One Chance to Get it Right’
- ‘Ambitions for palliative and End of Life Care: A national framework for local action 2015-2010’
- ‘Our Commitment to you for end of life care: The Government Response to the Review of Choice in End of Life Care’

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