

Maintaining Standards of PA Training

Background

Personal Assistants (PAs) working with Personal Health Budget (PHB) holders in the community are increasingly carrying out tasks traditionally undertaken by nurses and other healthcare professionals. To ensure complex needs patients can still count on a high and consistent standard of care at home, two nurses at South Tees NHS Trust have developed a training and assessment framework for new and existing packages of care.

“Continuing Health Care regionally has struggled with providing training in this area. We know from our Intensive Home Support Service that some clients with Personal Health Budgets have bounced from one agency to another because they’re not happy with the provision of care, or there are inconsistencies across PAs.”

Angela Milbourne, Clinical Matron, James Cook Hospital, Middlesbrough

In June 2015 Jemma Robinson, Clinical Sister for Middleborough’s Intensive Home Support Service, began the project by identifying skills regularly required in clients’ existing packages of care, and then compiling it into a framework of training competences. Meanwhile Angela Milbourne, Clinical Matron at Middleborough’s James Cook Hospital, worked to develop an effective assessment tool and training package. Angela explains, “Our vision was that you’d be able to easily assess any package of care. Then just pick up the relevant competences and offer the PA a bespoke training programme based on their client’s specific needs.” By February 2016 they were ready to test the new framework.

Existing Packages of Care

Jemma was excited to start testing the assessment tool on existing packages of care in the community. However, she was also aware they may well encounter resistance from PAs, or uncover some standards of care that fell below the ideal. But she found herself pleasantly surprised.

“One package I worked with was very complex, and also very established. The PAs had already been in place for years, so they were quite suspicious to start. But they soon became a lot more engaged and I could see that, despite the absence of any formal training, they met the framework’s requirements. By the end many of them said they would actually benefit from being reviewed annually and having further training opportunities.”

Jemma also found the framework applicable where clients chose to receive care from their family, rather than have PAs ‘intruding into the home’. “I worked with one client’s husband and daughter for a couple of hours,” she explained, “observing their competences with tracheostomy, ventilation and suction. I was satisfied they were both working to a really high standard and I was able to sign them as competent.”



Jemma Robinson,
Clinical Sister,
delivering
training to PAs



“When we’ve held training days the PAs and agency staff that come are actually very keen. There’s a thirst out there for increasing their knowledge and to progress in the care industry.”

Angela Milbourne, Clinical Matron, James Cook Hospital, Middlesbrough

New Packages of Care

The team was also presented with several opportunities to deliver bespoke training for new packages of care. For example, when a patient in the High Dependency Unit had their discharge delayed by confusion over care Jemma and Angela got involved to ensure a swift resolution. By intervening at this relatively early stage they were able to train and assess the patient’s PAs in the hospital and ensure their competence before the patient returned home.

“Ultimately that’s what it’s about – keeping patients safe in their own homes and ensuring good practice to increase their quality of life and reduce hospital readmissions.”

Angela Milbourne, Clinical Matron, James Cook Hospital, Middlesbrough

A Trusted Brand

To date, Jemma has completed 34 competences, 4 Standard Operating Procedures and a tracheostomy / complex care workbook which offers a step by step guide for the more complex tasks. In May the team is due to submit their final report to NHS England.

The next steps will be to plan how best to drive the project forward with the Deputy Director of Nursing. But the team is convinced this approach has a place in the future of UK healthcare.

“There’s a widespread and pressing need in the market for this sort of package from a trusted brand. We are a massive organisation with a vast breadth and depth of expertise.

Organisations like ours being involved with the training and governance of PAs can really reassure both clients and commissioners.”

Angela Milbourne, Clinical Matron, James Cook Hospital, Middlesbrough

“PAs are an integral part of the personalisation agenda, providing bespoke care for those they care for. They need to be supported and encouraged to develop their role and skills as a career and the NHS recognises this and is working to support PA’s and employers.”

Kirsty Freeman, Commissioning Manager, North of England Commissioning Support (NECS)

