



Improving management of long term conditions

Improving services in the East of England

More than 15 million people in England suffer from one or more long term health conditions. For some people, these conditions go unmonitored and unmanaged until a hospital visit becomes necessary, which can disrupt staffing levels and postpone or cancel scheduled operations.

Ten per cent of patients with long term conditions who are admitted to an acute hospital account for 55 per cent of hospital stays, so in 2005, the NHS committed to having 3,000 Community Matrons in place by March 2007. It soon became apparent that the role was varied and embraced the work of community and district nurses, physiotherapists and other people working in social care.

The aim was to offer proactive long term condition management in the home, to identify potential complications at an early stage and to reduce upset and discomfort to the patient. The challenge was to define the role and remit of a health worker managing long-term condition cases and to develop training modules that would fill any skills gaps.

Working with the Department of Health, Skills for Health examined its database of competences and arrived at a number of areas or “domains” that would standardise the role throughout England.

East of England SHA saw the Skills for Health draft competences as fundamental to its own strategic framework for case management. In Essex, all 75 community matrons and case managers are undertaking blended learning modules in a portfolio provided jointly through Essex University and Anglia Ruskin University. The modules have been specifically designed to meet the requirements of the national competency framework for Community Matrons and Case Managers, and provide academic credits towards a Masters degree.

“ *Our Community Matrons and Case Managers are much more confident in their role and feel that they are part of a group trailblazing a new way of working – so it’s been effective psychologically as well as on a technical skills level. The competency framework has been so valuable in shaping the proactive aspect of the community matron role.* ”

Paul Taylor Deputy Head of Education and Development, East of England Strategic Health Authority

A key aim of Skills for Health is to develop and manage a bank of national workforce competences which describe the performance criteria, knowledge and understanding required to carry out a work activity effectively. Because competences describe what individuals need to know and to do, regardless of who is performing the activity, they can be used in many different ways.

The Benefits

- Patients receiving more regular care not just at times of GP visit or emergency.
- Increase in patients managing their own conditions with support at home and reduction in calls for emergency services.
- Reduction in the risk of further complications in long term conditions.
- Release of hospital beds enabling more effective use of resources and reduction in waiting times for urgent cases.
- 'Blended' learning options reduce training costs and time away from patient care.
- Learning modules providing recognition as part of a national framework and evidence of CPD for regulatory and professional nursing bodies.

Using a consistent, competence-based approach has resulted in the role being established as standard throughout England. It is also being examined in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland for potential adoption.

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for the UK health sector (the National Health Services, independent healthcare providers and voluntary organisations). Our purpose is to help develop solutions that can deliver a skilled and flexible workforce to improve health and healthcare.

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