Acute liaison nurses

Everybody has a right to be safe no matter who they are or what their circumstances. We all have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of vulnerable adults and we must ensure that we are doing all that we can to protect the most vulnerable members of our society treating them with care and compassion and dignity and respect.

This case study highlights how Royal Cornwall Hospital Treliske has appointed an Acute Liaison Nurse to support patients with learning disabilities and their families throughout their hospital experience.

Why do we need this?

A Mencap report in 2007 stated that people with learning disabilities will require additional services when they attend hospital to ensure that their individual needs are met; however, this does not always happen.

In 2005 the Digital Rights Commission published a *Formal Investigation into Health Inequalities Equal Treatment: Closing the Gap* report which highlighted that ‘systematic discrimination’ is a significant factor resulting in health inequalities for people with a learning disability accessing health services.

In addition, the tragic nature of this discrimination is highlighted The *Death by Indifference* report by Mencap in 2007 which reports six deaths of people with a learning disability stating ‘institutional discrimination’ as a factor in the health inequalities experienced by the learning disabled. This was upheld by the Ombudsman report investigating the deaths in four of the six cases (Ombudsman 2009).

It is clear that this is major concern that must be addressed to not only improve the patients experience but more importantly to tackle inequality and discrimination and to raise awareness and understanding of care and compassion and dignity and respect.

The role of the acute liaison nurse service

The acute liaison nurse service helps support health professionals in hospital to make reasonable adjustments to their practice. Based within a hospital, the nurse is there to support the patient, family and carers and hospital employees. The acute liaison nurse plays an important role in preventing potential discrimination.
How does this work at Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust?

The Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust has had an acute liaison nurse in post since 2007, and now in 2013 has three nurses in post. They support both children and adults.

Here are two real life examples of how they have helped to improve our patients’ hospital experience:

**Scenario one**

A patient with autism refused to take his hat and socks off to go to the operating theatre. The theatre staff were concerned about this and the Consultant was reluctant to let the patient go to theatre.

After spending time with the patient, it was very clear he was not going to remove this clothing; they made him feel safe at a vulnerable time.

The acute liaison nurse supported the staff to make reasonable adjustments to allow the patient to keep his clothes until he was asleep. This did not breach infection control procedures, it was about supporting the patient’s individual needs, anxieties, coping strategies and understanding.

**Scenario two**

The patient was anxious about his operation and about the hospital environment in general; he understood the need for his procedure, but was extremely worried about coming into hospital.

It is usual practice for a patient to be admitted to hospital the day before a major operation. To support this patient, the acute liaison nurse made arrangements for this gentleman to be brought into hospital just half an hour before his procedure on the day. This limited his waiting time in the hospital. He was accompanied by a relative throughout his stay. His relative was allowed to accompany him into the anaesthetic room and support him until he was asleep, and then be with him in recovery when he woke. His relative stayed with him by his bed in a cubicle, during his stay on the ward.

If the patient had not had this support he would not have had the procedure, he wanted or needed. His care was tailored to his individual needs, anxieties and coping strategies. The liaison nurse ensured that he was supported throughout his treatment and supported the hospital staff to make them.

For more information
If you would like to find out more about the acute liaison service please contact:

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