

Project communication

Prevention and management of challenging behaviour related to a patient's clinical condition

Date: 28/10/2011

Challenging behaviour due to a patient's clinical condition is a widespread yet underreported problem affecting frontline staff working in the NHS and social care. This problem has been highlighted by stakeholders including the Royal College of Nursing, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Alzheimer's Society and others.

NHS Protect is leading a new project which aims to improve the assessment of patients who are at risk of being challenging, in order that such behaviour might be prevented; and to improve the management of challenging behaviour and understanding of how it relates to specific clinical conditions. The range of related conditions includes dementia, delirium, head and brain injury, substance abuse and withdrawal, mental ill health and learning disabilities.

The term 'challenging behaviour' can be used to describe deliberate or non-deliberate acts such as biting, scratching, pinching, hair pulling, punching, hitting, kicking and slapping, as well as non-physical acts. Such incidents can cause distress and/or pose a risk to the safety of staff. Patients may also bring harm to themselves, or cause alarm and distress to other patients and their carers.

One of the challenges in this area is to apply a joined-up process across different health and social care sectors to keep the problems associated with challenging behaviour from simply being transferred from one care setting to the next.

An expert group has been formed, including clinical professionals with first-hand experience of managing challenging behaviour in clinical settings, security specialists and violence prevention experts. The group is being tasked with developing guidance to include:

- Clinical strategies for improved assessment, diagnosis and management of patients who are at risk of exhibiting challenging behaviour;
- A set of universal descriptors to assist with the management of challenging behaviour;
- A recommended process for information sharing within and among organisations;
- Organisational responsibilities for the prevention and management of challenging behaviour;
- Practical 'must do' strategies to prevent and manage challenging behaviour.

The guidance will be available to staff, carers and family members. Additionally, a number of practical tools including case studies, audit tools, checklists and template documents will be developed.

NHS Protect welcomes the support of frontline staff, clinical leaders and managers across the NHS and social care for this important project. Further updates will be provided as work on it progresses. Any queries about the project and the work of the expert group may be sent to policy@nhsprotect.gsi.gov.uk.

Tackling fraud and managing security

NHS Protect is the operating name of the NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service which is provided by the NHS Business Services Authority.

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