

Person Centred Thinking and Acute Hospital Care

Maureen's story

This story shows how a residential services team in Wiltshire used person-centred thinking to support health colleagues in saving a disabled lady's life.

Just before Christmas 2008, Wiltshire County Council's Service Manager for Supported Living, Kevin Whelan, took an urgent call from his local hospital.

"One of the people we support - Maureen - was seriously ill," he explained. "Her general health had been deteriorating for some time, but then she caught a chest infection that became a real problem. She was admitted to a hospital in Bath following a number of visits by GPs and council staff to her home. Health professionals called me to say they were gravely concerned about her condition and that Maureen's next of kin should be called..."

Kevin and his team became aware that hospital staff were struggling to communicate with Maureen and this was having a dramatic impact on the way she was responding to her treatment.

"Maureen has a learning disability and mental health problems," he said. "She has difficulty communicating with people which is made worse by a hearing impairment. At the time,

the nurses at the hospital couldn't communicate with her or understand what she was trying to say. Maureen had to wear an oxygen mask but she kept taking it off. The nurses had to do blood tests and take samples... there were lots of medical things going on, and Maureen wasn't dealing well with that."

Kevin's colleague Rachel Sibbick went straight down to the hospital and explained to nursing staff the key points about the type of support Maureen needed, especially when it came to communication.

"During the transition of wards, Maureen's hearing aid for her right ear went missing, but this information wasn't given to the ward staff," Kevin said. "They just saw someone who was ill and decided they must carry on with their treatment without telling her what was happening. This was making Maureen really stressed. Rachel showed the nurses how to speak with her by getting up close to her right ear and speaking very loudly, while at the same time, using body language that Maureen was used to."

Person Centred Practices in Health

Kevin said this was the first step in helping Maureen’s health take a turn for the better. “Maureen started to understand what was going on. Once the nurses could communicate with her, she felt a lot happier and realised the important work they were doing to help her.”

Rachel wrote up a one page profile for Maureen. This helped hospital staff understand who Maureen was, what she liked and the kind of support she needed. When there was a change of shift, the new nurses would be able to communicate with Maureen and continue with her treatment.

“After that, Maureen’s condition improved dramatically,” Kevin said. “She made a full recovery and was

able to return home early in the New Year. We helped our health colleagues provide support to Maureen in a person centred way, including showing how to talk to her differently. It may seem like a small change, but it made a massive difference to her life, and probably saved it.”

Kevin said the Wiltshire team were now working more closely with other health professionals in their area to introduce person centred planning tools - like one page profiles - into all areas of their work.

“Supporting your staff to work in a person centred way can make such a difference to someone’s life. For Maureen, one small change was crucial.”

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