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Improving Client Transitions between SLT teams in NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde: A Knowledge Exchange Project

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The Risk

- Health policies in Scotland note a “continuing shift in the pattern of disease towards long-term conditions, and growing numbers of older people with multiple conditions and complex needs placing changing and increasing demands on the healthcare system”.

- Individuals with long-term speech, language, swallowing, or communication (SLSC) conditions are benefitting from increased longevity, which affects their use of services, and are at risk of developing further illnesses, such as sensory impairments, dementia and stroke.

- As their health needs alter, or if acute health difficulties develop, adults who have long-term SLSC move between specialist SLT teams as they access relevant health services. Available research suggests that service users are likely to have difficulties at such transition points.

The Research

- A research project in NHS GG&C investigated transitions across SLT teams for the range of adult service users with long-term conditions.

- It sought the views of service users and SLTs on factors that tend to facilitate or impede transitions, using critical incident techniques to identify good practice and potential difficulties.

- Results suggested that most transitions went well, but some service users and SLTs experienced difficulties at transition points.

- Analysis identified fourteen themes that comprehensively represented the data. Each had examples of negative and positive comments and of transitions rated overall as successful or less successful, suggesting they were robust constructs along which SLTs and clients evaluated transitions.

- Three over-arching themes were identified:
  - properties of SLT teams, including their roles, clients served, delivery models
  - communication and information exchange amongst SLT teams
  - outside influences on teams, including access to electronic patient records.

- Potential transition improvements were suggested.

The Knowledge Exchange Project

- A Knowledge Exchange project was developed between the University of Strathclyde and NHS GG&C SLTs, and formed a working group comprising: 10 SLTs covering geographical areas and specialisms in NHS GG&C; 2 SLT service managers, covering acute and community; 1 SLT from the Third Sector; 1 SLT researcher and 1 SLT Research Assistant from Strathclyde; input from a service-user representative and spouse, and eHealth advisors.

- Shared values were agreed:
  - to optimise the patient experience of services
  - to ensure the patient journey is seamless and barrier free
  - to avoid unnecessary delays in patient care
  - to ensure patients can navigate the services available.

- Outputs were the construction of:
  - a directory of relevant SLT departments and teams
  - a flowchart planning transition processes for active cases
  - a record of the transfer from planning to completion.

- As part of the knowledge exchange project, a small scale pilot was carried out in one geographical area and improvements were incorporated to reflect feedback.

Next Steps

- New transitions procedures to be extended across the health board.

- The directory of SLT departments and teams to be established with maintenance and updating procedures.

- To evaluate the impact of the new procedures on the well-being of individuals with SLSC conditions.

- To investigate increased access to electronic patient records for relevant SLTs.

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