

Role of community pharmacies in raising awareness of malnutrition in older people

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Aim

To explore the feasibility of community pharmacies in raising awareness of malnutrition in older people, and assess whether training provided to pharmacy staff led to improved awareness of malnutrition and specific conversations with older people. The aim was for each pharmacy to have conversations with at least 50 people, and the results of the initiative would help shape the future community pharmacy services in Portsmouth

Methods

Sept 2015 Training provided to 12 staff from 10 community pharmacies (2-hour face-to-face session in a local community centre) by two Dietitians and one member of staff from Portsmouth's Independence & Wellbeing team (IWT). The IWT provide practical ways to help people stay healthy and independent for longer. Training covered malnutrition awareness, nutrition resources and local groups & activities for older people. Knowledge was assessed before and after using qualitative data. Pharmacies were asked to cascade the training to other staff

Oct to Dec 2015 Four community pharmacies took part in a 3-month initiative, which involved talking to older people (using a structured questionnaire) about their weight, eating habits and any recent weight loss, and then providing some basic information, signposting and resources to support people to maintain a healthy weight. Pharmacy staff entered the data into PharmOutcomes (a web-based system which helps pharmacies provide services more effectively and makes it easier for commissioners to audit and manage these services), which was exported to Excel for analysis

Feb 2016 Following the initiative, informal discussions were held with each pharmacy (by the project dietitian) to obtain qualitative feedback on the implementation of the initiative

Approx £200 was provided by NHS Portsmouth CCG to the four pharmacies in lieu of attendance at training, data collection & dedicating some retail space to a display (similar to that provided for general assessments under the previously commissioned weight management service)

Conclusions

- This health promotion initiative demonstrated that training can improve malnutrition awareness in community pharmacy staff and lead to conversations with their customers about nutrition and provision of support around eating
- The number of conversations held (reflected by the number of questionnaires completed) suggest concurrence with existing research that community pharmacies can actively be involved in delivering public health services (Department of Health, 2011)
- Further research is needed to determine whether training around how to start conversations around nutrition would improve the number and quality of conversations, and whether community pharmacies could screen for malnutrition, e.g. using the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool

Rationale

80% of people >65 take at least one regular medicine dispensed by pharmacies (Welsh Government, 2011)

Visitors to pharmacies come from all sectors of the population and are often patients' first point of contact, and, for some, their only contact with a healthcare professional (PSNG, 2013)

Existing evidence suggests community pharmacies can be actively involved in delivering public health services (Department of Health, 2011)

Results



7 staff were trained from the 4 community pharmacies involved in the initiative (training was then cascaded to other key team members within each pharmacy)



Pre-training knowledge assessment revealed limited malnutrition awareness among staff before the intervention



260 questionnaires were completed by staff in the four pharmacies, reflecting conversations held with people visiting the pharmacies. Of these:

- 93% (n=241) were aged over 65;
- 68% (n= 177) were female
- 55% of people eat alone most days; two-thirds rarely eat a hot meal



Questions on body mass index and weight loss suggested a malnutrition 'risk' of at least 19% in those over 65



Signposting to GP (17% of people) and Adult Wellbeing (13% of people) was most common



Pharmacies differed in the way they approached people; e.g. a stand, use of consultation room and discussions on the shop floor. Staff from two of the pharmacies felt training on how to start a conversation about nutrition would have been useful

Reasons for the initiative's success

- The participating pharmacies are already 'Healthy Living Pharmacies', and have experience of providing advice
- Use of the pharmacies' existing recording system worked well
- Access and geography – pharmacies are open all day, including evenings and weekends, and are well spread throughout an area
- Connections with frail elderly and their carers; many patients are well known by staff; some by name
- Pharmacy staff naturally interact and have conversations with people on the shop floor
- While still being a professional NHS service, pharmacies can provide a more informal service, where information provided isn't necessarily recorded and often without the need for an appointment
- Financial incentive provided by the CCG, in line with other services