

## An evaluation of the challenges to implementation and early impact of Wessex AHSN's e-learning hydration resource in care settings

### Background

As the population of older people is increasing, more people are finding themselves in care homes or domiciliary care settings than ever before. Older people often experience complex health issues, one of which is dehydration. Dehydration in care settings is common and can lead to serious consequences such as falls and urinary tract infections (UTIs). Whilst this can be caused by factors associated with the process of natural ageing, it can also be caused by institutional and organisational factors such as high staff turnover, hierarchal management schemes, lack of time, staffing challenges and lack of training. Scoping work undertaken by Wessex AHSN suggested that hydration training was needed to help skill up carers and dispel myths. In response, the Hydration at Home Toolkit (which includes hydration e-learning and public health resources) was developed in collaboration with Hampshire County Council, then tested and launched nationally.

Wessex AHSN worked with the University of Southampton to submit a plan for an MSc student project to help us evaluate the e-learning aspect of the toolkit (in terms of the challenges to implementation during Covid-19 and the early impact in care homes). This document provides a summary of the work and dissertation produced by MSc Public Health student Georgia Towson.

### Methods used

- **Challenges to implementation** - Five key stakeholders involved in the project were interviewed. Information from these interviews was used in combination with information on the original planned timeline to discover the main challenges in the implementation of the e-learning
- **Early impact data** - 23 care staff and managers completed surveys to help us understand the early impact of the resource. Interviews along with a promotional video (where one care home described the impact the training would have on their practice) were audio-transcribed and analysed using statistical software.

### Results: Challenges to implementation

Interviews with stakeholders confirmed some key themes regarding the need for e-learning, including lack of hydration knowledge by care staff, poor current resources available to train care staff, and the need for training to include myth busting. Key challenges around the implementation of the e-learning facing care settings, along with the challenges affecting timely launch are shown in the table below:

Key challenges cited by stakeholders	
Potential challenges facing care settings	Challenges affecting timely launch and dissemination of e-learning
Support from managers (to actively encourage staff to complete training)	Covid-19 (working from home meant that communication / meetings had to happen remotely; new competing pressures of the project team as well as care settings)
English as a second language (when it comes to accessing training, using simple language is key)	Time factors (took 18 months from initial concept to launch, which was longer than anticipated)
Time to complete training (a challenges in terms of workload and competing pressures)	Communicating the launch (how to best to use social media to get messages out there)

Carer priority (due to Covid-19, other care challenges took precedent, e.g. PPE; some carers may not see the benefit of the training)	Technical issues (having to re-do voiceovers, correct typos, and ensure all aspects worked on Health Education England's portal)
Private care homes may be more of a challenge to engage due to having independent policies and procedures	Collaborative working look longer than working alone (however it did help make a better product)
	Care staff engagement, e.g. resistance to take part in testing caused a delay

## Results: Early impact data

Stakeholder interviews highlighted key areas within the care settings where they hoped the e-learning would have a positive impact. These included health and wellbeing of residents / clients (reduction in falls and UTIs; improved activity, alertness, independence, control and general wellbeing), impact on staff (e.g. improved resident hydration may free up time for them to support other complex residents; improving confidence and knowledge) and organisational impact (e.g. economic benefits). The data revealed the following early impact:

- Carers and managers all reported that they had learnt something new, had become more confident or seen an improvement in assessing hydration, had implemented changes to enhance hydration or that it had a positive impact on their own hydration
- Carers reported to be assessing hydration on a more personal level and offering more variety of fluids
- Some differences in the responses between care staff and managers were observed in terms of whether they had seen an impact in residents (focusing on alertness, UTIs and falls). This may be due to the policy being in place, but not sufficiently practised
- Many care staff also stated that they were already sufficient in assessing hydration before the resource. Results found the resource may be most suitable for new or underperforming staff.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Challenges in the production and dissemination of the e-learning were largely similar to those found in other studies conducted by Wessex ASHN in the testing phase, however collaborative working and the impact of Covid-19 were new challenges not mentioned before.

Despite the small sample number involved, the early impact data of the e-learning has shown promising results. However, it is too early to assess the longer-term impact on residents, staff and organisational processes. Therefore, a recommendation was made to carry out a further impact study on the e-learning resource once more care staff had been able to complete the training. This should include a larger sample size of care staff.

## For more information...

- Please visit: <https://wessexahsn.org.uk/projects/354/hydration-at-home-toolkit> or email us: [healthyageing@wessexahsn.net](mailto:healthyageing@wessexahsn.net)
- To view / complete the e-learning: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/hydration-in-older-people/>