

Fitting the pieces together with the AMBER care bundle

21 December 2012

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Key points

- A key feature of the Transform Programme is its flexibility, which allows Trusts to build on existing work and decide which priorities to focus on first.
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust was already developing end of life care on several fronts when it first joined as a phase 1 pilot.
- Joining the Transform Programme, and implementing the AMBER care bundle in particular, helped the team see how all of the pieces fit together.

Background

On joining Transforming end of life care in acute hospitals as a phase 1 pilot site, Worcester Acute Hospitals NHS Trust was already progressing many aspects of end of life care. Therefore, the team felt confident about considering all five of the Transform Programme's key enablers from the start. However, it was the rollout of the AMBER care bundle that suddenly made everything come together.

Challenges identified and actions taken

Motivation is high, as staff want very much to provide the best care possible for patients nearing the end of life, and for their families. However, time pressure on busy wards is a constant challenge and there are many competing priorities. Staff were not always clear about where the responsibility for end of life care should lie, and when to start the process for individual patients.

As one way to fit in with busy work schedules, ward-based training makes it easier for staff to attend sessions. Access to an e-learning programme, End of Life Care for All (e-ELCA), also allows professionals the flexibility to study at times that suit them. This time-conscious approach to training is allowing staff to build their skills and confidence in areas such as symptom control, advance care planning and difficult conversations.

The Transform Programme has been especially helpful with some of the other challenges, and is proving to be the missing piece that brings the whole puzzle together. The AMBER care bundle, which is one of the five key enablers for the Transform Programme, is a simple tool that helps staff to identify patients whose recovery is uncertain. The AMBER care bundle also makes it very clear that the medical team has lead responsibility but each member of the multi-disciplinary team has a role to play. Therefore, training in end of life care is now mandatory for all clinical staff, covering the six steps of the national end of life pathway. To support implementation, there is an AMBER care bundle resource folder on each ward, and a ward-based champion who can provide advice to colleagues.

Outcomes

- As the AMBER care bundle was launched, the team carried out a baseline audit. Six months later, the benefits were already apparent:
- 40 patients identified in a recent AMBER care bundle quality audit as recovery uncertain all had an agreed and documented care plan.
- The Liverpool Care Pathway, another key enabler of the Transform Programme, was being used appropriately.
- There were no hospital re-admissions among patients who had expressed a desire to avoid this action.
- Staff are also expressing increased confidence, especially in knowing when to start the conversation and what to say.

Future plans and sustainability

The main goal at this stage is to embed the Transform key enablers so they become a routine part of the Trust's day-to-day patient care activities. The team will continue rolling out the AMBER care bundle and the Liverpool Care Pathway across the wards, and developing Advance Care Planning and an Electronic Palliative Care Coordination System (EPaCCS). The key to sustainability is training, especially to build awareness, skills and confidence among all nursing staff and the wider multi-disciplinary team.

Tips for success and transferability

- Support from the Trust executive board is a prerequisite for success.
- Tying end of life care to CQUIN goals (Commissioning for Quality and Innovation) ensures a high profile within the Trust.
- Employing a full-time End of Life Care facilitator is ideal. This work is much more than an 'add-on' responsibility for other roles.
- Involvement of senior nurses inspires staff and drives practical changes.

Transform End of Life Care in Acute Hospitals Programme further information.

www.endoflifecare.nhs.uk