

Bitesize Case Study: Supporting Bereaved Relatives Training for Porters



This case study is one in a series of studies curated to capture best practice, and highlight innovations, from the joint Health Education England (HEE) working across the North West and Voluntary Sector North West 'Learning Matters' awards 2017. The awards are part of a cross sector adult learning campaign delivered for the health and care sector through a number of key regional partnerships and collaborations. The overarching theme of the awards is simple: lifelong learning is good for people, organisations and health.

HEE Quality Standards met:

- 1 - Learning Environment and Culture
- 3 - Supporting and Empowering Learners

What was the issue or problem? What did you set out to do?

Improving end of life care is a priority at national and local level and this includes how relatives of those who have died are supported. A 2015 NIHR report "Better Endings", raised concerns about the way certain bereavement services are provided including "skills and training gaps for general staff caring for the dying." Some porters had stated that when they were collecting the deceased to take them to the mortuary they wanted to "get in and out of there as quickly as possible" and that they often felt uncomfortable and ill equipped to talk with the bereaved "in case they made things worse."

Their fear of not knowing what to say and lack of understanding of what would be helpful in these sensitive circumstances often made the staff unwilling to interact with the bereaved, which in turn could make a bereaved family feel less supported and even more isolated. What the team wanted from the project was for the porters to feel supported, knowledgeable, and confident in their role, and as a result bereaved families would also benefit from their understanding and increased sensitivity.

What did you do? What was the intervention or initiative?

In March 2016 an Learning & Organisational Development (L&OD) Facilitator met with one of the Bereavement Specialist nurses to look at what support and training was being delivered at University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust (UHMBT) to support porters in their role. As a result the team met with managers and staff to look at what they would find helpful and increase their confidence - a one hour training session was built around their suggestions. The training took place as a trial on the Lancaster site and has since been extended to include domestic and other non-clinical staff across the bay. The training has meant working across different staff groups within the trust.

With this in mind, the 1-2 hour targeted sessions include PowerPoint, short video clips, cards with helpful and unhelpful responses, basic theories around patterns of grief, and information about what support is available for the bereaved families and for themselves within UHMBT. All were given the chance to share their experiences and recognise the important role they play in the Trust. The training was delivered where possible by both a Bereavement Specialist Nurse and the Learning and Development Facilitator with previous experience of working in a hospice.

This meant that any factual and practical issues could be addressed by the nurse while the facilitation, organisation and evaluation of the sessions could be planned by the facilitator. Due to the nature of the sensitive issues involved an integral part of the session was to develop and maintain a safe and supportive environment where staff were able to talk openly about often distressing and emotional issues.

What were the Key Outcomes?

Evaluation sheets were collected at the end of each session and then collated. So far, the positive results of the training have far exceeded expectations. All the evaluations show that each staff member found the training sessions worthwhile and that their confidence in supporting bereaved relatives had increased. Some of the more experienced staff said that although they didn't think that the training would extensively change how they interacted with bereaved relatives, it was good to know that they were doing and saying the right things and having the training made them feel valued. The outcome of the training was that staff stated that they now felt able to make eye contact, show active listening, and where appropriate acknowledge the relative's loss. These basic changes can make a significant impact on how the recently bereaved perceive that UHMB staff care and are dealing sensitively with their loved ones.

Due to the impact of the training, it has now been expanded and delivered to other staff groups in the trust such as estates, ward clerks, medical secretaries and switchboard staff. This learning recognises that non-clinical staff also have an integral role in supporting patients and relatives at the End of Life and as such need to be given the support to carry this out with confidence.

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What were the lessons learned?

The key learning generated from the project is how targeted training with small groups of staff can have a huge impact on service delivery. Listening to front line staff and supporting them in their role benefits everyone and as a result also benefits bereaved families who are at their most vulnerable.

One of the hardest challenges to overcome was providing training to fit in with the porters work rotas. Due to the nature of their work patterns and low numbers of staff it was important the training could be flexible and delivered to small numbers in order to avoid having a negative impact on the needs of the hospital.

As a result, the pilot training was tailored to small groups to ensure the staff's ability to attend and also for them to feel able to share in discussions and voice concerns. The Facilities Manager at Royal Lancaster Infirmary (RLI), was very supportive in releasing staff to attend the sessions which underlined the value of the training. The need for flexibility, such as training in smaller groups and offering 1 hour sessions, was vital if the managers were going to be able to release their staff for training. As a result, the training has now been rolled out across the Trust and is being offered to all non-clinical staff coming into contact with bereaved relatives as part of their role.

Level of award:

Winner - Supporting Learners Project Award

Organisation:

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust (UHMBT)

Author: Janette Thorpe

Key contact: Helen O'Neil
Helen.O'neil@mbht.nhs.uk

References

National Institute for Health Research. (2015) *Better Endings: Right care, right place, right time - an independent review of NIHR research on end of life care services*. NIHR. [Online] [Accessed 2nd June 2017] <http://www.dc.nihr.ac.uk/themed-reviews/Better%20endings%20FINAL%20DH%20single%20page.pdf>



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