The Valued People Project:

Looking at ways to get better at training NHS staff to support people with learning disabilities

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1. Introduction

The Valued People Project

In May 2008, The ‘Valued People Project’ was set up to look at ways to improve:

- How we buy education for learning disability nursing, and
- How staff work in NHS learning disability services.

Many groups of people were asked to help with the project.

Different ways were used to collect the information.
We wanted to find out:

- What would help future planning
- How learning disability staff are used today
- New ways to learn and develop skills in learning disability
- How to include important skills in supporting people with learning disability.

**Background**

In NHS South Central, there are more than 136,000 people with a learning disability. The number is growing especially for people who will have complex health needs.

They are more likely to have poorer health care.
For example, compared to others they are more likely to:

- Die before they are 50 years old
- Have epilepsy
- Use more medical and dental services
- Use hospitals less for operations than other people
- Have shorter stays in hospital
- Have fewer checks, e.g. blood pressure, cervical or breast cancer.

Also, they are less likely to be given:

- Pain relief, or
- End of life care.
Things that affect care for people with learning disability include:

- The carer’s role
- What health staff feel about people with learning disabilities
- How health staff communicate with people with learning disabilities
- Where people are being cared for or supported

The NHS have difficulties with supporting people with learning disability in:

- Mental Health,
- Big General Hospitals,
- Children’s services,
- Community services.
To sum up - the increase in numbers of people with learning disability, some with complex healthcare needs, and the problems that the NHS has in supporting them means that NHS South Central must look at:

- Staff right across the NHS workforce, as well as
- The specialist NHS learning disability staff.
2. NHS South Central Services

**Today**

- A single NHS Trust that only provides services for people with learning disabilities
- Mental Health Trusts
- Private, voluntary and ‘not-for-profit’ national and local providers of health and social care
- NHS services for people with learning disability have become more expert but they need to make their services better.
In the future

- There will not be enough staff with qualifications

- It is important that if people want to work hard that they get promotion and have good jobs

- Training is needed in:
  - taking responsibility
  - buying services
  - leading staff
  - learning how to make good managers, and
  - much more.
Challenges

For services that only support people with learning disabilities:

• People with learning disability experience: Abuse, indifference, discrimination and neglect

• We must change how staff behave towards people with learning disability using a human rights approach.

For the rest of the NHS:

• Help in getting NHS services the same for everyone

• Some services may need help to do this

• All health courses must include disability awareness and learning disability training.
To sum up - care and support for people with learning disability has moved from NHS services to the social care sector, such as local authorities, and the independent and voluntary sectors.

This means we now have less trained learning disability staff working with more people with learning disability.

What is needed in the future is:

- Good jobs and prospects in the NHS
- To make sure that training for the workforce is up to date
- To make sure that training is supported by people with learning disability, their families and carers.
3. Getting information

Who and how?
We looked at services and providers across NHS South Central using:

- A questionnaire
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Books and government documents
- The internet.

The following people helped by joining different groups:

- People with learning disabilities
- Parents and family carers
- People who buy education
- Health and social care managers
- Learning disability staff
- Teachers and students.
The groups have some common concerns and they include:

- The way learning disability nursing is bought, and that people thought this would not work in the future,
- There are no courses for people once they have qualified,
Other concerns:

- Learning disability as an NHS job option must be supported by NHS South Central
- A ‘learning resource’ should be made for all NHS workers
- A regional learning disability education centre should be set up
- A new course needs to be developed for a new worker in learning disability
- NHS South Central should support and help specialist Learning Disability NHS staff.
4. The Learning Disability NHS Workforce

There are problems getting students, also students are leaving courses and this means there won’t be enough specialist learning disability staff in the future and we are losing money.

Also, there is:

- A worry that because there are so few students on learning disability courses that Universities may not run these courses in the future
- A problem that some staff do not know enough about how difficult it may be to support some people with learning disability
- A difficulty in running learning disability nursing courses when the number of students and teachers is small.
Some figures

- Learning disability nurses are the largest part of the NHS qualified learning disability workforce
- Only half of the number of students needed come on to courses, another quarter leave the course before they finish, and only a small number get to employment
- The current specialist learning disability workforce is getting smaller – over half no longer work in the NHS
- NHS South Central has kept the number of learning disability students almost the same since 2005. This may not be enough - a lot of specialised learning disability nursing staff may retire in the next 5 years
• NHS qualified staff are choosing to work in social care or private health care outside the NHS

• Over half of the specialist workforce don’t have any professional qualifications and are supervised by nurses

• There are very few senior jobs in learning disability in the NHS.

To sum up - the way we buy learning disability nursing education needs to change, and we need to think about other staff for the future as well.
5. A New Workforce

In this section, reasons will be given for making the jobs we now have better also develop new jobs in the Specialist Learning NHS workforce.

The workforce needs to change, and has to be better at helping and supporting people with learning disability and their families.

Also in this section, a new way of buying education for learning disability will be talked about.

Reasons to develop the workforce

• We now have lots of new laws and these must be at the centre of all education programmes for the Specialist Learning Disability NHS workforce
• The rest of the NHS staff must also better understand the needs of people with learning disability

• Future specialist and mainstream NHS workers must support and help people in non-discriminatory and non-oppressive ways

• All NHS services must include what people with learning disabilities want from health and social care

• Students of all health professions and teachers must look at how they learn about people with learning disabilities and their families

• Changes to services mean many learning disability nurses now work in lots of different areas and have lots of different jobs
• Some learning disability nurses work in general hospitals and mental health services. They may have community jobs and work with children and young people.

• Others support:
  ▪ People with learning disabilities who have behaviour that challenges
  ▪ Children and young people
  ▪ Adults with profound learning disabilities and complex needs
  ▪ Custody nurse practitioners, and
  ▪ Forensic specialists.

• Community learning disability nurses now provide services in sexual health, epilepsy, challenging behaviour or early onset dementia and end of life care.

• Students will need better and modern training.
A new way to buy education

• The way we buy education for learning disability nursing needs to change, otherwise we won’t have enough for the future.

• We need a new organisation to make this happen. They should:
  • Use different ways of teaching
  • Include all the new laws
  • Make sure the new students are all from different backgrounds.
A new Centre in Learning Disability

- This should be at one University that has lots of experts and the right level of resources.
- They would also provide courses for people when they have qualified in leadership and research for the specialist learning disability workforce.
- The centre should help NHS South Central better understand learning disabilities.
- The centre would have to get other organisations to buy things from it as well.
A need for a new worker

• The groups said that there was a need for a new learning disability worker

• This should be someone very practical who can work in health and social care and who is able to support the qualified staff

• They could offer help and support for other staff

• They might undertake a new course in learning disabilities and work in the NHS at Band 4.

• They would all do some of the course together, e.g.
  - Communication
  - Person centred approaches
  - Learning about laws
• The new worker would do their course at work and University.

• They would do lots of new things like support a Social Worker, and support people with housing, and or benefits problems, help with feeding difficulties and communication problems.
6. Recommendations

NHS South Central has been asked to agree to the following recommendations:

- Work with others to develop a way to make more students become learning disability nurses
- Help all staff who work in learning disability services to decide what they want to do about their jobs
- Make sure that staff know that someone high up is leading them
- Buy a course for all NHS staff about how to support the needs of people with learning disabilities
- Look at education and training so that they do make a difference to people with learning disabilities and use people with learning disabilities and their families and specialist
learning disability NHS staff with training

- Tell the Universities that already teach courses that NHS South Central won’t buy their courses any more,

- Write a document that will help NHS South Central buy new courses in learning disability education.

- Make sure that we have enough NHS learning disability staff for the future.

- Carry on with the ‘Valued People Project’ to make all this happen.