Communication care plans – what does ‘good’ look like?

Jo Laud — Speech and Language Therapist
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

Project aim — Improve the quality of communication care plans for service users

Background
At the beginning of this project, the picture in Hampshire was one of varied quality in communication care plans that care providers had in place for their service users. This meant that the communication needs of adults with learning disabilities were not reliably being met. There was no consistent approach in measuring the quality of a communication care plan and Speech and Language Therapy would regularly receive referrals to assess how individuals could communicate.

This was despite two pieces of documentation that are available to support service users’ communication needs. These are:

- The 5 Good Communication Standards produced by the RCSLT in response to the Winterbourne View report - each standard provides information on how 'good' looks like.
- The Accessible Information Standard - organisations that provide NHS or adult social care must follow the accessible information standard by law, to ensure that people can receive the care in a format they understand and with the communication support that best suits them.

From the above outline I proposed this project - to improve the quality of communication care plans and ensure service users’ expressive communication and understanding were better supported. As I am co-located with Adult services colleagues who carry out reviews of service users’ packages of care, including communication care plans, this seemed a good opportunity to work with them, with the intention of providing a more consistent approach in measuring the quality of communication care plans.

Design
My starting point for this piece of work was to devise a questionnaire for Adult services colleagues. This design was used as it was evident that a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach would be beneficial to determine a baseline in order to investigate:

- My colleagues’ current practice in relation to what a good communication care plan looks like
- Their understanding and application of the 5 Good Communication Standards and Accessible Information Standard
- Their understanding and skills in relation to a range of communication strategies

Responses from this questionnaire would shape what needed to be put in place to support good quality communication care plans and to support my colleagues’ current awareness, skills and knowledge.

This baseline questionnaire was devised and delivered in the summer of 2017. Training was implemented to increase skills, knowledge and practice and then the questionnaire was re-submitted after a 3 month period, to all 22 colleagues who had attended the training.

What changes occurred
From the baseline questionnaire it was evident that there was originally limited understanding of The 5 Good Communication Standards and the Accessible Information Standard as well as a varied understanding on a range of communication strategies. I then offered communication training as drop in sessions for staff. The sessions were grouped into:

- Symbolic understanding and visual support ideas
- 5 Good Communication Standards
- Accessible Information Standards
- Easy Read and links for AIS
- Make sense — easy signs

In return I asked each colleague who attended to answer one question. The question was: ‘From your current practice, and following this training, what prompts would benefit you when completing a service user’s review, to provide a consistent approach in measuring what a good communication care plan looks like?’ Every participant generated ideas, without any input from myself.

I attended a team meeting so that together with the team we ranked the prompts to finalise the top 5, based on which could be added to the review paperwork under the communication section. The top five ranked prompts were as follows:

1. How best to communicate with the service user
2. How does the service user communicate – list all the ways
3. What is the best way to support a service user’s understanding
4. How does the service user express pain, anxiety and enjoyment
5. Who knows the service user well to help them communicate

It is hoped that this will enable a more consistent approach in discussing a service user’s communication care plan with the care provider, and ensure there is a deeper understanding of what ‘good’ looks like.

The observations were compiled 6 months after the baseline questionnaires were carried out. It was initially hypothesised, there was evidence that there was increased awareness of the standards, increased knowledge and greater understanding of the importance of these documents to effectively support service users with communication needs.

Examples of baseline information

Understanding of objects of reference

Awareness of the 5 Good Communication Standards

Awareness of the Accessible Information Standard

Next Steps

From this piece of work, these prompts are being rolled out with the service manager to have the list added to the electronic review paperwork, but currently colleagues have it available in paper form.

In addition to this change, there have been three other key developments which have arisen from this project:

1) Professional's prompt sheet

2) Development of other health domains on the review paperwork

3) Local university collaborative project

- Development of other health domains on the review paperwork
- Knowledge and practice and then the questionnaire was re-submitted after a 3 month period, to all 22 colleagues who had attended the training.

Please contact me at jo.laud@southernhealth.nhs.uk or telephone me on 01329 316226