

Interviewing elderly patients with cognitive impairments about the quality of their hospital care using Talking Mats™

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Elderly Patients in Hospital

2/3 of UK hospital beds are occupied with patients over the age of 65

Cognitive Impairments

50% of patients over 70, admitted into general hospitals as emergencies, have cognitive impairments

Background

Elderly patients with cognitive impairments risk being excluded or discriminated against if they are not asked their opinions about hospital quality and care. It is sometimes assumed that such people cannot be reliably interviewed, but this may be due to failure to use interview techniques to aid communication. We report our findings of an interview study of such people, using the communication aid "Talking Mats™", which makes use of picture symbols to enable communication (Murphy 2007).

Talking Mats™ provide a visual framework for people with communication difficulties, helping them understand and respond, encouraging involvement in conversations.

Enabling Communication

Method

Twenty six patients who were confused at point of hospital admission were approached in hospital for interview about their experiences of being in hospital. Mini Mental State Examinations (MMSE) were conducted on all. Patients who were judged by the dementia-researcher to be cognitively able to answer reliably in a traditional interview did so. In the remainder, the interview was attempted using a Talking Mat™.

Results

N=8/26 (31%) interviewed reliably conventionally (mean MMSE 19, range 14-24)

N=7/26 (27%) not interviewed reliably conventionally, but reliably using Talking Mat (mean MMSE 9, range 1-18)

N=11/26 (42%) not interviewed reliably either conventionally or using Talking Mat (mean MMSE 12, range 0-24)

Talking Mat Result

MMSE Score = 7/30



The proportion of cognitively impaired patients, able to communicate increased from 31% to 58%

Talking Mat Result

MMSE Score = 1/30



Conclusion

Talking Mats™ appeared to increase the proportion of people with cognitive impairment who could be asked to give reliable opinions about their quality of care, compared to conventional interviews alone. If replicated, Talking Mats™ provide a means to reduce exclusion and discrimination and hence improve the quality of care for elderly people with cognitive impairment.

Reference

Murphy, J. (2007) Using 'Talking Mats' to help people with dementia communicate. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: http://www.vhscotland.org.uk/library/vol/jrf_nov07_talking_mats_findings.pdf

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