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Communication and comfort measures for people with Dementia at end of life: Integrating specialist services in community settings

Because we are all growing older and living longer, the chances of many of us having to live and die with dementia are increasing. Care at end of life can be particularly challenging in this context. This study assesses the impact of a series of workshops for care home staff on improving communication and comfort measures at end of life for people with dementia. Interviews and observational visits were conducted three months later with carers to assess whether these approaches had been embedded into practice.

The evidence that was gathered demonstrated that carers could make a significant difference to a person's comfort and care at the end of life, even within the context of dementia. Giving carers frameworks for pain assessment and exploring multiple communication methods, promoting confidence in the approaches they were taking and empowering them not to "leave their emotions at the front door" – all these had enabled carers to provide effective and compassionate multidisciplinary palliative care for their residents with dementia. It had also enabled people with dementia to remain in their existing care homes as so many of them had originally requested.

Biography

Kay Donnellon is a senior lecturer within the University of Cumbria in advanced clinical practice and palliative care in both undergraduate and post graduate programmes. After a long career in community and primary care, palliative care has remained a passion and has allowed her to develop collaborative working arrangements with local hospices assisting in accrediting modules with them. She is a current PhD student researching quality in out of hours services where she is an active member of her local clinical governance group as well as an Advanced Nurse Practitioner.

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