A passport to better care

Becoming a student champion for Parkinson’s disease awareness helped Lorraine Ramnath create a new patient tool

By Alison Whyte

Having worked as a healthcare assistant (HCA) for almost 20 years, Lorraine Ramnath found training to become a nurse at the Open University gave her a new insight into patient care.

‘As an HCA, you carry out your tasks as well as you can to care for your patients,’ she says. ‘As a nursing student with increased knowledge, you think differently about the whats and the whys of care provision.’

Ms Ramnath had heard that one of the biggest fears patients with Parkinson’s disease face is having their medication routine disrupted when they are admitted to hospital. After she joined Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust’s Parkinson’s Awareness Group as a student champion, she became more aware of the difficulties they face. ‘Even a short delay in taking their medication can have a devastating impact on these patients,’ she says.

‘Their symptoms can deteriorate very quickly. This can affect mobility, or the ability to communicate needs effectively.’

Missed medication

Ms Ramnath took part in sessions with HCAs, nursing students, patients and carers, which highlighted that Parkinson’s medication can be missed on admission because the patient has been brought in for another reason, such as a fall.

‘It’s no one’s fault. It’s a break in communication, especially if the patient is admitted unaccompanied,’ she says.

Ms Ramnath knew of the beneficial impact of the This is Me booklet carried by people with Alzheimer’s disease, so she decided to design a ‘Parkinson’s Passport’ to address the gap.

It contains information about the patient’s type and timing of medication, mobility, nutrition and hydration, sleeping, communication and bowel movements, which can affect how medication is absorbed.

Delays in medication can have a devastating effect on people with Parkinson’s

Get it on time

‘It could be noted in the passport that a patient has periods during the day when their symptoms fluctuate,’ she says. ‘But if a decline is seen that does not appear to be normal symptoms, the nurse can stop and think. Has medication been missed?’

She says it is important to allow patients to self-medicate when they are able, because hospital medication rounds happen at set times – something that may not be appropriate for those with Parkinson’s.

Her hospital is promoting Parkinson’s UK’s Get It On Time campaign to help patients get medication at the right time.

The passport will be rolled out across the trust over the summer. With about 700 patients with Parkinson’s in the Peterborough area, it could have a major impact.

‘It has been received positively by patients who are pleased that someone is fighting their corner,’ Ms Ramnath says.

Alison Whyte is a freelance journalist