College launches initiative to improve the dementia skills of care home nurses

Programme aims to help staff spend more time with residents, and work with carers and relatives

By Jennifer Sprinks

THE RCN has launched a pilot programme to help nursing staff who work in care homes make improvements to care for residents with dementia.

The scheme, funded by the RCN Foundation, is based on a previous dementia project that was run by the college in acute hospital settings in 2011.

The latest programme draws on the project’s five principles for providing good dementia care, which can be summed up using the mnemonic SPACE (see panel, right). They include ensuring that staff are skilled and have time to care.

The programme will help care home staff to develop their skills and knowledge; improve their understanding of the role of carers, families and friends in dementia care; draw up local action plans for changes; and evaluate the effect of improvements.

Full evaluation

Six care homes across the UK have been selected to take part in the 12-month trial, and in events to share best practice after six months and on completion of the programme. A full evaluation of the project’s outcomes will also be undertaken.

The RCN will interview staff at the start and end of the programme to compare whether attitudes and knowledge have changed or improved. It will also evaluate progress by examining local and national indicators, such as number of falls, length of residents’ stay in homes, medication errors, and residents’ and carers’ satisfaction before and after the programme.

RCN professional lead for older people and dementia care Dawne Garrett said: ‘Some care homes are registered for dementia but many are general registered.

‘The prevalence of dementia is increasing yet, unfortunately, access to training, dementia awareness sessions and financial support is not anything like it is in the NHS. Dementia training for all staff is not necessarily achieved in independent care homes.’

Brenda Rushe, care home manager at Weavers House in Cookstown, County Tyrone, said her home would like to study the causes of residents’ distress and how staff can help reduce it.

Increasing prevalence

Ms Rushe said the aim is to look at residents’ histories, including their likes, dislikes, former professions and lifestyles, before they arrive at the home. These pre-admission assessments should expand and improve on existing ones.

‘Knowing about residents’ histories is important so we need to involve families and carers, and have conversations with them,’ Ms Rushe said.

‘They know what could cause them distress so we need that information as soon as possible.’

Sharon Williams, care home manager at Swn-Y-Mor in south Wales, said she wants to adjust staff attitudes and ways of working so that they are more in line with the needs of people with dementia, as well as adapting the environment so that it is more dementia friendly.

‘I want to make it more homely for patients and look at what we can do to get people talking and to bring some of their memories back.’

Call for review of health and social care provision

AN ALLIANCE of 40 organisations, including older people’s charities, has written an open letter to prime minister David Cameron urging him to hold a commission on the future of the NHS and social care.

The move follows the tabling of a bill by former health minister Norman Lamb MP that calls for an independent cross-party commission to review the future of health and social care in England.

Mr Lamb warned that underfunding in the systems ‘will have serious consequences for patient care’. The bill is backed by two former health secretaries, Stephen Dorrell and Alan Milburn.

The open letter, which has been signed by organisations such as charities Independent Age and Alzheimer’s Society, and think tank International Longevity Centre-UK, states that the UK is facing monumental demographic challenges because nearly 25% of the population will be over the age of 65 in 20 years’ time.

Director of policy and external relations at Independent Age Simon Bottery said: ‘A commission on the future of health and social care is the vital first move towards recognising that the health and care systems cannot work in isolation. Only when they work effectively together can the needs of older people be met.’