DeAR-GP aids referrals

Dementia case-finding tool helps to reduce the number of undiagnosed cases and implement proper care planning

UNDIAGNOSED DEMENTIA among care home residents runs into the ‘tens of thousands’, making it difficult to access appropriate care, relevant treatments, interventions or services.

The dementia case-finding tool DeAR-GP (Dementia Assessment Referral to GP), co-developed by the Health Innovation Network (HIN) and care home workers, helps reduce the number of undiagnosed cases and enables proper planning of care and support.

When excluded from diagnostic tests, care home residents are unable to:
- Make informed choices.
- Plan for the future.
- Receive care informed by a thorough understanding of their care needs.
- Access appropriate treatments and/or interventions.
- Participate in and contribute to research.

Up to 80% of care home residents have dementia, according to the Alzheimer’s Society (2013). In south London, it is estimated up to 9,000 people in care homes have dementia, many of whom are currently undiagnosed.

The HIN is the Academic Health Science Network for south London. It connects academics, NHS commissioners and providers, local authorities, industry and patient and carer groups to accelerate the spread of innovations and best practice across its clinical programmes, including dementia.

HIN clinical director for dementia Hugo de Waal recognised care home workers were best placed to help identify signs of dementia and lead on the co-design of the dementia case-finding tool DeAR-GP. This is a one-page form that includes a behavioural observation chart and the AMT 4 test for cognitive impairment with a GP referral letter.

Dementia diagnosis

The HIN developed a dementia case-finding tool with five care homes in south London. The study focused on:
- Co-designing a dementia case-finding tool with care workers.
- Testing the result to establish whether care workers have the skills, knowledge and understanding to use it appropriately and autonomously.
- The proportion of residents identified who went on to receive a dementia diagnosis on review by an appropriate clinician, such as a GP or memory nurse.

DeAR-GP was tested in three care homes on residents with no known diagnosis of dementia and where the care staff had concerns about the resident having dementia. In two, a memory nurse reviewed those residents for further assessment. In the third home, a GP completed the review.

On review, 12 out of 23 residents were diagnosed with unspecified dementia and three were referred to memory services. Five were found to already have a diagnosis. No further action was taken with one resident who had a normal cognitive score. Two were not reviewed because of illness.

The memory nurse said DeAR-GP saved time because, in using it, care workers had already identified residents showing signs of dementia before the GP’s arrival.

Care workers unanimously agreed that they could, and should, play an important role in raising concerns regarding residents having memory problems or dementia.

The dementia case-finding tool can be used by care workers confidently and effectively to start identifying care home residents who may have dementia. Used before a visit by a clinician, it means their time is more focused.

By Hugo de Waal, clinical director (dementia), and Aileen Jackson, senior project manager, both of the Health Innovation Network

Reference

Alzheimer’s Society (2013) Low Expectations. Attitudes on Choice, Care and Community for People with Dementia in Care Homes. tinyurl.com/jk2o7yk (Last accessed: May 12 2016.)

Find out more

DeAR-GP is available to download at www.dear-gp.org

The Health Innovation Network (HIN) is the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) for south London. It is one of 15 AHSNs across England. Visit www.hin-southlondon.org to find out more about HIN’s work.

For more information about the AHSNs visit tinyurl.com/jk2o7yk