HCA award winner’s passion and enthusiasm shine through

Cemlyn Roberts supports people with learning disabilities when taking blood

By Elaine Cole @PrideInNursing
A healthcare assistant who significantly improved care for people with learning disabilities through an individualised, gentler approach to taking blood has been recognised with a prestigious RCNi Nurse Award. Cemlyn Roberts, who works for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in Wales, won the RCN Healthcare Assistant award category.

‘When I joined the community health liaison team in 2010, the healthcare assistant role was in its infancy. Over the past seven years I have helped to develop it into what it is today,’ says Cemlyn.

‘I enjoy the ability to support people who have learning disabilities and educate them to take a more proactive approach.’

This has included developing accessible information about complicated surgical procedures to help people understand and make informed decisions about their care.

**Well Man programme**

As well as his desensitisation programme, Cemlyn compiled and delivered a Well Man health promotion programme for men with a learning disability, which has been rolled out across Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire. He supports service users newly diagnosed with diabetes to follow a healthy lifestyle, providing training, easy-to-read information, menu planning and shopping lists. He also educates staff and families who support an adult with a learning disability.

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*Cemlyn Roberts*
Cemlyn directly supports people with a learning disability who have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act who require a period of assessment and treatment in an acute hospital, and helps the patient engage with therapeutic services.

He shares best practice with staff, attends the weekly ward rounds and multidisciplinary team meetings, and helps ensure safe discharge planning.

Positive difference
His line manager, locality matron for health liaison Kim Scandariato says: ‘Cemlyn has made a positive difference to a number of service users who have needed blood to be taken. This has also improved how they access other health services, for example reducing their anxieties around going to GP appointments and hospitals.

‘Cemlyn’s work also means individuals do not need to be sedated to have bloods taken and ensures that most are not anxious the next time round.

‘His service is much appreciated by professionals in community learning disability teams. Their time can be spent on other interventions as they do not have to do blood desensitisation work that can take a couple of months to complete.’

‘His communication skills and ability to relate to individuals, recognising their unique needs, has been key to the success of the initiative.’
Margaret Sneddon

She points to one case in which a patient with a moderate to severe learning disability had been physically deteriorating for a number of months. The GP had requested blood tests.

The man often displayed aggressive and challenging behaviours when anxious, but Cemlyn worked with him patiently, using flash cards and showing him equipment that would be used.

He progressed to putting a tourniquet on the man and took him for a number of visits to the clinic room until eventually the patient tolerated having blood taken without sedation. Since then the man has had a number of blood tests without any problems.

University of Glasgow honorary senior research fellow Margaret Sneddon, who was on the nurse awards judging panel, says: ‘Cemlyn impressed us with his commitment, patience, determination and creativity in the strategies he implemented to enable people with a learning disability to overcome their fears.

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Moving forward
Despite achieving an impressive 98% success rate with his blood desensitisation audit, Cemlyn continues to push to improve. High on his to-do list is to publish his blood desensitisation work and do an audit, as well as expanding his Well Man programme to Anglesey and North and South Gwynedd.

He says: ‘I am very proud to have been recognised for my work with this nurse award and that my team members nominated me.

‘But I am most proud of empowering adults with a learning disability to access much-needed health tests and information. I enjoy supporting them to have choice.’

Elaine Cole is managing editor, Nursing Standard