Nurses are in ‘perfect place’ to offer psychological therapy to patients

By Christian Duffin

Intensive care nurses will receive training in psychological therapy in a landmark venture to help patients who experience hallucinations, delusions and panic attacks.

The preventive psychological intervention is part of a £2 million study into reducing post-traumatic stress disorder among intensive care patients.

Six intensive care nurses at two hospitals will train this summer. Their experiences will help refine the programme before it is introduced at another 22 hospitals later this year.

Clinicians will complete a three-day course loosely based on cognitive behavioural therapy techniques, enabling them to offer patients talking therapy or ‘support therapy’ in three sessions lasting up to an hour each.

Nurses will also be trained in ‘alternative diversional therapy’, which involves engaging patients in activities such as listening to music.

Impaired recovery

Intensive care patients often experience psychological trauma, in part because they take high doses of sedatives, and multiple invasive treatments. These patients sometimes endure such levels of distress and are so psychologically disturbed that recovery is impaired.

The National Institute of Health Research is funding the project. Researcher Deborah Smyth, a senior nurse for research and development in critical care at University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (UCLH), said: ‘Nurses are on the wards 24 hours a day and they can develop a rapport with patients and pick up signs that something is wrong. You do not have psychologists available all the time so nurses are in the perfect place to give support therapy.’

UCLH psychologist and researcher Dorothy Wade, said: ‘The trial is exciting for us, because no large-scale studies of psychological treatments started in the intensive care unit to prevent future post-traumatic stress disorder have ever been carried out.’

Half of surviving intensive care patients have post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety, she added.

Melanie Gager, a nurse lead for rehabilitation after critical illness at Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, said: ‘Some patients report never getting over the psychological consequences of their critical illness, so this research is an opportunity to address an important part of the patient experience.’

Employers reward staff’s efforts to boost flu jab uptake

Campaigning by nurse managers resulted in a record flu jab uptake among NHS staff this winter.

NHS Employers figures show that by the end of January, 53.1 per cent of all front line staff – almost 500,000 people – were vaccinated. The uptake remains below the government’s 75 per cent target, but represents an increase of 57,504 on last year’s figures.

NHS Employers has announced that nurse manager Tracy Lees from Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust is the winner of its Flu Fighter award, for encouraging and motivating staff to have their jabs. Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust took the most improved Flu Fighter campaign award. Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust won the #flufighter digital and social media award.

NHS Employers chief executive Dean Royles said: ‘We would like to see staff having the flu vaccination as normal practice. People still have reservations so it is important our campaign keeps up the momentum, highlighting that if they have the jab there are benefits for themselves, their patients and their families.

To see figures for flu jab uptakes by trust go to tinyurl.com/q3s8m9c