

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Evaluation of a dementia training workshop for health and social care staff in rural Scotland

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ABSTRACT

This short project report presents an evaluation of a training workshop for health and social-care staff working in one of the most rural areas in Scotland. The objective was to explore the learning needs and outcomes of training participants delivering services to people with dementia in a rural area. The training workshop encouraged health and social-care staff to discuss key challenges they experienced in their dementia care practice, as well as providing information on dementia care, services and rural dementia research. In a post-training evaluation, despite barriers to implementing learning, participants rated their satisfaction with the workshop as high overall. Further training needs identified included: how to recognise dementia, what the diagnostic process entails, and the management of challenging behaviour. Health and social-care staff in rural areas of Scotland require further training on specific issues related to dementia to enable them to be confident in the diagnostic process and delivery of post-diagnostic dementia services.

Key words: dementia, evaluation, health and social care workers, rural Scotland, training.

There are currently 35.6 million people with dementia worldwide¹ and this is expected to increase to 115.4 million by 2050. The increasing demand on public health highlights the need for education and training to support dementia care staff. The provision of training to health workers is essential to provide the knowledge and skills required for high quality

dementia care²⁻⁶. Numerous national and regional policy initiatives have emphasized the knowledge and skills gaps for both dementia specialist and non-specialist staff⁴⁻¹⁰. The government of Scotland has introduced a target for the National Health Service to make improvements to the early diagnosis and management of patients with dementia.



Subsequently, a National Dementia Strategy was introduced, making dementia a national public health priority⁶.

To address specific dementia-care training needs in the rural Scottish Highlands, a one-day tailor-made workshop for health and social-care staff was organised to:

- raise awareness about the importance of recognising and diagnosing dementia
- give staff an opportunity to discuss their role in recognising and managing dementia
- promote better understanding of current service delivery issues and staff training needs.

An open email invitation was issued to approximately 1140 health and social staff in the rural area where the training took place. Few staff have a dementia-specific remit; however, all staff who may offer services to persons with dementia were encouraged to participate. The training was attended by 18 staff, 10 of whom provided dementia care. Only three of these participants had attended any dementia training previously. This suggests there is a need for basic information and awareness raising among staff working in rural areas.

The workshop program included speakers specialising in differing areas of dementia care, including service improvement, provision of services, and rural dementia research. Group exercises were introduced to stimulate active participation and facilitate peer learning. The exercises included a case study analysis, a problem solving task, and a discussion of what it might mean to live with dementia.

The key training needs identified in the pre- and post-training evaluation included:

- improved understanding of dementia-related issues
- better knowledge about services and ways to provide help to people with dementia and their carers

- an update on current initiatives available and future changes in service provision.

Specific issues included nutrition, managing behaviour that challenges, and communication with people with dementia.

The anonymous post-training evaluation questionnaire sought information on the respondent's satisfaction with the course information and content, how they thought the course would influence their practice, and suggestions for future training needs. Fifteen of the 18 participants were able to identify the influence of the training on their practice. The key areas that were expected to change as the result of participating in the workshop included early recognition and diagnosis of dementia, and improved knowledge of available services. These findings demonstrate that participants were able to make the connection between acquired learning and their practice.

This training evaluation must be interpreted carefully due to the small sample size. However the analysis of participants' views allows for a better understanding of current knowledge about dementia-related issues among rural health and social-care staff. In addition, staff identified specific areas where further information and training support were required, including how to recognise dementia, what the diagnostic process entails, and the management of challenging behaviour.

Numerous barriers to implementing learning were also identified, such as issues with GPs and other colleagues, and a lack of resources. Despite these barriers the workshop received an overall high satisfaction rating from participants. Finally, the evaluation provided information to assist in developing successful models of training for health and social-care staff in rural areas of Scotland that would enable them to be confident in the diagnostic process and delivery of post-diagnostic dementia services.



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