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Background

Home-care workers are increasingly caring for clients with dementia. Workers are usually low paid, have limited dementia training, and are working on their own. Little is known about their experiences of providing day-to-day care to people with dementia.

Aim

To explore the skills, knowledge and experiences of home-care workers when providing care to people with dementia.



Method

We conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with home care workers in one locality in the East of England. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis was inductive and thematic.

Findings

Challenges faced

- Time constraints
- Clients' dementia-related characteristics
- Refusals of care
- Bearing individual responsibility

Challenge: Refusals of care
"there are times when you have people that just won't accept any personal care whatsoever, which is really difficult because ... sometimes you know that they're soiled"

Challenge: Client characteristics:
"you can't ask a dementia client how they like to do things, whereas you can ask anybody else"

Identified risks

- Clients being left alone
- Client behaviours
- Lone working

Risk: Lone working
"Just being on your own, there's no second eyes on it or anything like that"

Risk: Client behaviours
"Sometimes when you're taking their underwear down to toilet them they tend to hit out"

Strategies for completing care

- Caring relationship
- Caregiver approach
- Distraction
- Communication Techniques
- Structural strategies

Structural:
"if you keep a routine, you could see that twinkle [twinkle] in their eyes, they recognise the voice"

Communication *"Instead of 'would you like to go for a wash?' How about 'let's go have a wash before we have our breakfast.'"*

Strategies for managing risk

- Support from care team
- Learning from caregiving experiences
- Drawing on training

Training
"You learn so much more from being on the job"

"I had specific training courses in dementia, like working with people with challenging behaviour (sic)"



Distraction:
"So say they've refused to wash, erm I'll maybe distract with a cup of tea and then the breakfast"

Caring relationship:
"to recognise those small wincings of pain ... you know picking up on those little signs are so much more important than anything else"



Caregiving experience
"You learn so much more from being on the job"
"I'm always nervous and anxious, but I never allow that to show on my face or my body language"

Care team
"So sometimes you do need to call on somebody else and you do just need to say 'oh help me' and then you can get it done"

Conclusions

Home care workers demonstrated multiple skills and areas of knowledge to manage apparent challenges and risk when caring for people with dementia:

Skills: relationship building, decision making (for example, whether to persevere or adapt), observation of the person, communication, and interpersonal sensitivity (for example, being empathetic or inoffensive)

Knowledge about: the person, the person's needs, the workers' own role and responsibilities, their own abilities, the potential impact of their actions, and company policies and procedures

Sensitivity, self-awareness, and being in-tune with the potential consequences of their own actions helped home-care workers overcome multiple perceived challenges and risks.