

Commissioner Brief

The importance of a Carer Support Nurse role: findings from a pilot in Great Yarmouth

The problem

Families and friends play a crucial role supporting people they care for as their unpaid carers. However, they are not always well prepared for this, and it can damage their own health and wellbeing. This can impact their ability to keep 'caring' and lead to crises. This problem has been acknowledged in national policy.

The intervention

A Carer Support Nurse role was developed with carers and cross-sector stakeholders, to support carers who have their own needs, or who need extra support for their caring role, that cannot be met by their usual healthcare team. The role involved carer acknowledgement and listening; person-centred assessment and working with the carer to develop solutions; providing health screening; supporting carers to access health services and advocating on behalf of carers among other things.

The role was piloted for 12 months and based in community provider East Coast Community Healthcare in Norfolk and Waveney.

Impact

124 cross-sector carer referrals were received in the 9-month evaluation period. An important but small (non-statistically significant) improvement in carer quality-of-life, wellbeing and preparedness to care was identified from a small sample of carers who completed a follow-up survey. Given the complex needs of referred carers and the trajectory of the caring role, any improvement, or even maintenance, in outcomes score is encouraging.

The role was overwhelmingly universally well-received: by carers who heard about and received the intervention; by health, social and voluntary sector professionals who referred to and worked alongside it; and by other regional and national stakeholders in carer support.

The role was nominated and shortlisted for two national awards and won one regional award.

Key points for commissioners

- The Carer Support Nurse role was successful: it meets an important well-established need. It now needs testing on a larger scale, with potential to improve carer well-being and resilience, and reduce costly interventions at crisis points e.g., hospital admissions.
- Important findings regarding the fundamentals of the role, and how to implement it effectively, have already been identified including five evidence-based design principles; the need for a team model (including senior and admin support); and the Agenda for Change grade and level of experience (an experienced band 7 registered nurse supported by band 6 registered nurses is recommended to maximise reach). These evidence-based recommendations, plus others in the final report, (at least partially) de-risk further implementation efforts.
- There are opportunities for future development to tailor the role based on pressing local need such as making the role accessible to young carers.



More information about the project, including the executive summary and final report, can be found here:

<https://arc-eoe.nihr.ac.uk/research-implementation/research-themes/palliative-and-end-life-care/carers-support-nurse-pilot>

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