Supporting quality care for people with dementia in the community:
Training in home care staff to use person-centred communication

Dr Erin Conway and Prof Helen Chenery
UQ Centre for Clinical Research, The University of Queensland
OVERALL BACKGROUND

Social interaction is key to wellbeing and personhood

People with dementia face dual disadvantage
- Progressive communication impairments
- Reduced opportunity for social engagement

Community aged care staff play key role in facilitating social engagement

But lack of understanding of the need and ways to provide staff with necessary communication skills
COMMUNICATION IN DEMENTIA

Difficulties with every-day communication is a prominent and distressing feature of dementia

• Predict problem behaviours
• Impedes expression of personhood
• Contribute to caregiver stress and burden

Major areas of difficulty

• Word finding
• Auditory comprehension
• Conversation

“Gotta- um (Mpause) it's a um (LPause) yeah it was um (LPause) oh, I've forgotten the name of the damn thing n- now (MPause) um…”

Conversation partner needs to accommodate to the individual with dementia
QUALITY COMMUNITY AGED CARE AND COMMUNICATION

Increasing uptake of community-based aged care internationally

Quality community in-home aged care (Low et al., 2012)
• Significant role in facilitating social interaction
• Consumers identify staff interpersonal communication abilities as key

“Conversation is caring. You aren’t just chatting, you are acknowledging someone as a person…”
(Young et al., 2011: 1017)
• Role to provide socialization for people with dementia

Challenge for dementia care practice is to recognise the importance of communication as part of care
MESSAGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN DEMENTIA

MESSAGE
M – MAXIMISE attention
E – EXPRESSION and body language
S – Keep it SIMPLE
S – SUPPORT their conversation
A – ASSIST with visual AIDS
G – GET their message
E – ENCOURAGE and ENGAGE in communication

1. Attract attention
2. Avoid distraction
3. One at a time

1. Give time
2. Find the word
3. Repeat then rephrase
4. Reminders of the topic

1. Interesting & familiar topics
2. Opportunities to talk

© The University of Queensland, 2012
MESSAGE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TRAINING

Training DVD content
- Introduction to communication changes in dementia
- MESSAGE Strategies for Care Staff
- Teaching Examples for discussion

Previously research suggests MESSAGE Training has a significant impact on residential staff knowledge
THE CURRENT STUDY AIMS TO…

Evaluate the outcomes of training community-based care workers in communication support strategies on staff knowledge of strategies to support communication in dementia

In order to establish a much needed evidence-base for communication skills training across the continuum of dementia care.
PARTICIPANTS

Three community-care centres in Queensland

Pilot group of 7 in-home care staff
- 100% female
- Age: $M = 58.6$ years ($range$ 48-66 years)
- Years education: $M = 10.8$ years ($range$ 6-14 years)
- Years care experience: $M = 9.9$ years ($range$ 2.5-20 years)

All staff provided care to at least one person with dementia

Each staff member was partnered with a client with a diagnosis of dementia, with whom they completed some research activities
PROCEDURE

Outcome measures

- Knowledge of communication support strategies (9 short-answer items)
- Training opinion survey

Assessed at baseline and immediately after training

Single training session involving video presentation of MESSAGE

- 60 minute session
- Presented to small groups of staff
- Discussion facilitated by Speech Pathologist
- Additional training booklet
RESULTS: Knowledge of communication support strategies

Significant increase in knowledge of communication support strategies immediately after training ($Z = -2.366, p = 0.018$).

![Median knowledge scores](image)
RESULTS: Training survey

How useful do you think this training was for you?

- Not useful: 0%
- Fairly useful: 20%
- Very useful: 80%

How easy do you think it will be to use these strategies in your everyday work?

- Easy: 60%
- Moderate: 20%
- Hard: 20%

Would you recommend this training to a friend or co-worker?

- No: 0%
- Maybe: 40%
- Definitely: 60%

How much do you feel you have learnt from this training?

- Nothing: 0%
- A little: 20%
- A lot: 80%

Translating dementia research into practice
DISCUSSION

Promising pilot results

Effectiveness of simple, low-resource intensive training

Similar outcomes across the continuum of care

Current research is continuing to expand upon pilot findings

• Full staff data set will include: larger sample; 3-month follow-up with additional outcome measures, and a usual care control group
• Indirect impact of training on clients with dementia
• Sustaining a change in staff communication behaviour
SUSTAINING A CHANGE IN STAFF COMMUNICATION

Extended Training Procedure
• Video-based training session
• Two revision sessions in the weeks following
• Individual feedback given on real conversations with clients

Direct measurement of staff communication behaviour
• Strategy use in conversation
• Personhood enhancing/detracting interactions
CONCLUSIONS

Conversation is part of care and improving staff communication has the potential to improve quality of care

Focus on community care is important due to environmental advantages and benefit of delayed transitions

MESSAGE Communication Strategies in Dementia training has the potential to improve communication in aged care settings
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dementia Collaborative Research Centres: Carers and Consumers for funding support

Community care organisations for their assistance with recruitment

The other contributors to the MESSAGE training – Helen Chenery, Anthony Angwin and Rosemary Baker

Note the MESSAGE Training is available at YouTube.com/UQDementiaCare
REFERENCES


*Note the MESSAGE Training is available at YouTube.com/UQDementiaCare*