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A survey study of community pharmacy practices in providing communication support to patients with sensory impairment.



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Introduction:

The Accessible Information Specification^[1] acknowledges that many service users receive information from health organisations which they do not always understand. The Accessible Information Standard (AIS) aims to ensure that people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss are provided with information that they can easily read or understand, with support, so they can communicate effectively with health care services. From 31 July 2016, all organisations that provide NHS care are legally required to adhere to the AIS.

Aim:

To explore the level of awareness amongst community pharmacy staff about the AIS, and the nature of communication support they provided to patients with sensory impairments.



Research design and methods:

A questionnaire was developed and distributed by post, to a random sample of 100 community pharmacies in Somerset. The survey gathered anonymous data including: awareness of the AIS, methods used for identifying and recording sensory impairments, and strategies used for effective provision of information. Microsoft Excel[®] was used to analyse closed questions using descriptive statistics to determine mean decimal values for each statement. Open comments were subject to content analysis.^[2]

Results and Findings:

- 100 questionnaires were sent out and 29 returned. Of these, only 4 respondents (14%) were aware of the AIS.
- Observation of communication aids such as hearing aids (15 respondents (52%)), observation of behaviours (11 respondents (38%)), and being informed by the patient or carer (14 respondents (48%)) were cited most commonly as methods used to identify that a sensory impairment was present.
- Strategies stated most commonly for communication with those with hearing impairments were hearing loop systems (22 respondents (76%)), and for visual impairments, large print resources (22 respondents (76%)).
- Patient medication records were commonly used to record patients' sensory impairments and communication needs, 22 respondents (76%) cited this use.
- 9 respondents (31%) stated that they had a communications policy or guideline to support communication with patients with sensory impairment.
- The most commonly reported barriers to provision of tailored communication support to patients with sensory impairment were time constraints (14 respondents (48%)) and lack of training (10 respondents (34%)).

Conclusion:

Awareness of the AIS is important, from the perspective of complying with their obligations as NHS contractors, and in the delivery of adequate patient care. Despite the level of awareness found, many pharmacies are complying with some aspects of the standard and striving to support this patient group. Better communication is needed between policy-makers and providers with regards to the AIS. Further exploration of communication between policy-makers and service providers is warranted to develop ways to bridge this communications gap.

References:

1. NHS England, Patients and Information. Accessible Information Specification [Internet]. Leeds: NHS England, 2015 [cited 2016 October 1]. Available from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/access-info-spec-fin.pdf>.

2. Hsieh J, Shannon S. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 2005; 15:1277-1278.

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