

Working with young people to improve communication and prepare them for transfer to adult services

The MAGIC team – Newcastle

This case study describes how the team in Newcastle working on the Health Foundation's MAGIC programme to implement shared decision making worked with the children's rheumatology service at Newcastle Hospitals Children's Services to support new approaches to communicating with young people and preparing them to transfer to adult services.

After the MAGIC team spoke at an audit meeting to raise awareness of shared decision making, the Great North Children's Hospital rheumatology nurse specialists wanted to re-evaluate their services to achieve greater involvement with their patients aged from 12 to 20. The two issues they wanted to look at were: how young people could be encouraged to be more involved during consultations; and how to prepare them for the transition to adult services.

Young people are often worried about what to say to the doctor:

Nurse Specialists felt it was important to find out what questions their patients most commonly want to ask during their consultation and conducted a survey "A spoonful of questions about medicines". The work identified some difficult / personal questions that teenagers and young people would like to ask, but find difficult to raise. These included questions such as: Can I have alcohol if I go to a party? Will my medication affect my fertility in the future? Can I safely have piercing?

As a result of the work the team have introduced:

- **Question cards:** Nurse specialists now use the informal pre-consultation chat with young patients to find out what their concerns and issues are. Nurse specialists attach 'question cards' to the patient record and the doctor uses them to guide the consultation.
- **Question of the month:** Each month a sample question is stuck across laminated posters displayed in waiting areas to encourage patients to ask common questions. There are different poster versions, designed in collaboration with the MAGIC team, aimed at teenagers and younger children.¹

¹ Example posters are available to download from the Health Foundation's Person Centred Care Resource Centre

- **Ask 3 questions flyer:**² The MAGIC team had already developed 'Ask 3 Questions' flyers to encourage people to ask 3 questions during their consultations with their health professional. The MAGIC team has supported the service to modify these so that they are more appealing to young people. The flyers have proved popular with older teenagers who are supported to write down what they want to ask during their consultation e.g. one young man wanted to know what the benefits and risks would be if he stopped taking his medication.

"A spoonful of questions about medicines"

- Encourages discussion during the consultation.
- Tackles 'controversial' issues that may be hard to bring up without a prompt

Initially 15 questions were available to choose from to take into the consultation. These have now been refined to 5 key questions

Common concerns for young people undergoing treatment for rheumatoid arthritis

- If I'm on medication can I have piercings?
- What will happen if I don't take my medication?
- Are there any long-term side-effects? Will it affect my ability to have children in the future?
- I'm going to a party. Some of my friends drink – can I?
- How long will I be on this drug for?

² Example flyers are available to download from the Health Foundation's Person Centred Care Resource Centre

Encourage young people to go into the consultation room without their parents, to prepare for transition:

In paediatric services, conversations are often between parents and staff, and the young person may have little involvement. As a result of being familiar with this passive role, transition from children's to adult services is known to be difficult for young people and steps are being taken to prevent young patients from 'dropping out' of hospital care e.g. the Care Quality Commission are currently working with commissioning and other organisations to identify good or poor practice.

Nurse Specialists in the Great North Children's Hospital found that "A spoonful of questions about medicines" helps prepare young people for transition by building their confidence to talk to their doctor openly, and be comfortable to go into the consultation without their parents or advocate.

Parents clearly need reassurance that their children are being well supported and looked after and they are invited to join in after the consultation, so that the young person can feed back what has been discussed and the outcomes and plans, whilst withholding personal and confidential matters.

This method has worked extremely well:

- Young people are comfortable to go into the consultation independently
- Young people are confident to feedback to parents, demonstrating their knowledge and understanding
- Parents are happy with these arrangements
- Medical staff say that consultations are much more valuable
- Confidentiality is maintained

Outcomes

As a result of this work:

- *You're Welcome*³ (the Department of Health's quality criteria for young people friendly health services) accreditation achieved by the service, partly as a result of this work
- Launching modified (young person friendly) Ask 3 Questions flyers to all departments in the Great North Children's Hospital
- Consultations are effective and shorter and the service has begun to schedule three additional out-patient appointments per session
- Simple ideas can be effective and inexpensive!

For further information contact Lucy Craig (lucy.craig@nuth.nhs.uk) and Ruth Wyllie (ruth.wyllie@nuth.nhs.uk); Tel. 0191 2820373.

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216350/dh_127632.pdf