Health and Older People

Get it Right - PUBLIC HEALTH PUBLIC SERVICE

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Growing older has too long been associated with an inevitable decline in health. Although health needs will change and some people will require increased levels of care many older people enjoy active and healthy lifestyles.

It is important that our health services reflect this and are designed to maintain and promote health in older people as well as caring for those that require more intensive intervention.

Preventative services such as good foot care, dental care and screening programmes are essential for the dignity, quality of life and well being of older people. These services are essential in ensuring older people receive treatment for the more minor conditions that, if left untreated, could mean that they need more acute assistance and possibly lose their ability to remain independent. Lack of services such as basic foot care can lead to complications that can result in dangerous falls, severe restrictions on mobility and social isolation.

Nurses in primary care are ideally placed to focus on healthy lifestyle checks with older people and the provision of health advice to this group. This is as important as responding to specific treatment needs for individuals.

Age Discrimination is a particular problem within mental health services where services are often split between those for “adults of working age” (up to 65) and those for “older people” (65 and over). Other older people find that they no longer fit the support criteria for their local service and are therefore excluded from sources of support that they require. Older people should be treated on the basis of need rather than age and given equal access to treatment such as counselling and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as well as equal choice and quality of treatment.
The Welsh Assembly Government strategy Free to Lead Free to Care includes actions designed to improve standards of nutrition and Fundamentals of Care in hospitals. RCN Wales believes these actions must be implemented and the values outlined in the RCN Campaigns on Nutrition and Dignity be embedded into practice both within the NHS and the independent sector.

Finally older people need to be able to access health care and services and lack of appropriate transport can be a major barrier in many parts of Wales. This is an area that should be addressed in the strategic planning of health services particularly those in rural areas.

This briefing has been prepared in partnership with Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales.

get it right
cymryd y camau cywir

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

- The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that preventative health services such as good foot care, dental care and screening programmes are maintained.
- Mental health services should reflect the need of the patient and not discriminate on the basis of age.

This RCN Wales Policy Briefing was produced in November 2009. For more information please contact RCN Wales on 02920 751373