

Changing practice through action research: three examples in children's nursing

Dr Antonia Beringer (Research Fellow), Karen Tomasino (Lead Nurse, Childrens Services) and Pat Mahendran (Professional Development Nurse)

Care of adolescents with mental health needs

Impetus

Concern about the management of adolescents with mental health needs in an acute environment.

Process

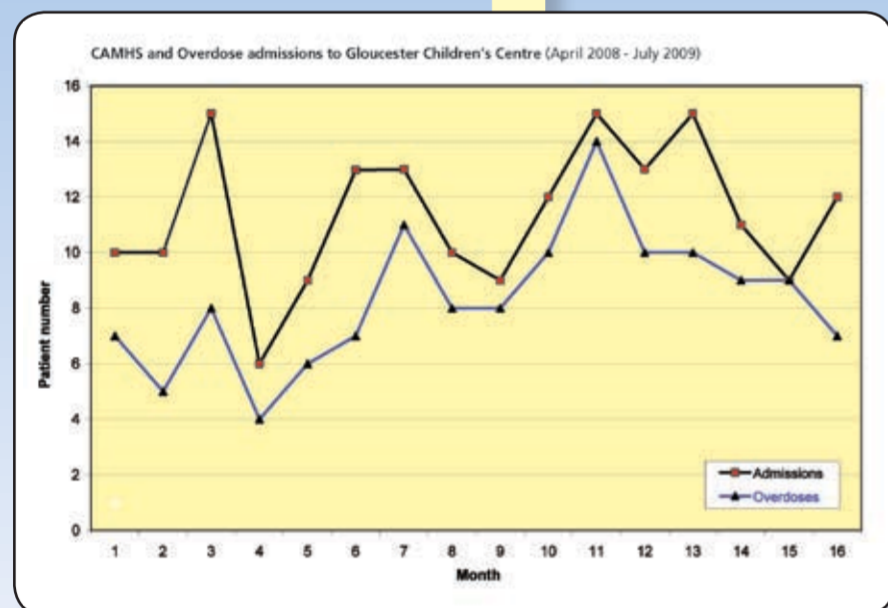
- Project group began by mapping the perceived current shortfalls and gaps in provision.
- Data on admissions for self harm as a proportion of all 'mental health' related admissions was gathered to identify the scale of the issue. The mean number of admissions each month was 10.6 of which 70% were due to overdose.
- Risk assessment component of the Trust self harm policy was trialled.
- Teaching information currently offered to staff was gathered.
- A short vignette on restraint was written.
- Information on current restraint policy and training was gathered.

Output

A report which detailed the information gathered above which was presented by group members to the unit consultant group.

Outcome

Cross-disciplinary recognition of the need to improve management of the care of adolescents with mental needs in the acute setting and the formation of a multi-disciplinary working group.



Perceived current shortfalls and gaps in provision of care	
Communication	General Nurses feel they lack the skills to look after. Inappropriate environment - acute unit. Have no standardized plan of care. Training not geared to acute setting.
Location	The unit is a busy acute unit - staffing is geared to this. The Adolescent area is not in an area of direct observation. Self harm Adolescents end up in open bays next to toddlers and pre-schoolers.
Knowledge and Skills	Issues about knowing who is responsible - CAMHS or Gen Paediatrics. No joined up care between CAMHS and the ward. General Nurses feel they lack skills and background knowledge to look after.
Operational - process of care	Very poor PCT provision for mental health inpatient care. Unnecessary inpatient delay over weekend, as no CAMHS nursing cover. Issues over transition to adult services.

Provision of equipment for ongoing care in the community

Impetus

To refine the process for providing equipment for the provision of intravenous therapy at home.

Process

- Current ordering and packing process critically reviewed.
- Provision of equipment by community and acute service agreed.

Outcome

New 'pick list' designed detailing content and amount of equipment per day of intravenous therapy. Reduction in 'missing' equipment and over-supply.

Availability of take home medicines

Impetus

Concern about the time families could spend waiting on ward for medicines to take home.

Process

- A cross disciplinary project group convened, including ward nurses and pharmacy staff. Current practice for obtaining medicines to take home critically reviewed.
- Delays in process which contributed to delays in discharging patients identified.
- Agreed aim to increase proportion of medicines dispensed from ward to reduce delays related to waiting for take home medicines.
- Proportion of take home medicines dispensed from ward and from pharmacy audited.

Outcome

Pharmacy policy for dispensing take home medicines from ward revised and agreed. New policy adopted and process implemented across two hospital sites

	Total number of patients discharged	Number who received take home medicines dispensed from ward	Number who received take home medicines dispensed from pharmacy
January	610	85 (44%)	105 (56%)
February	629	98 (46%)	114 (54%)

Action research process

- Timescale - one year +
- Workshops to launch process
- Project groups formed
- Site-based, flexible, facilitated sessions

Outcomes from the projects ...

- Improved definition of care processes
- Greater clarity about who does what
- Project teams developed a range of transferable skills
- Links forged within and outside the hospital
- Research showcased at Conference

Factors that facilitated the projects

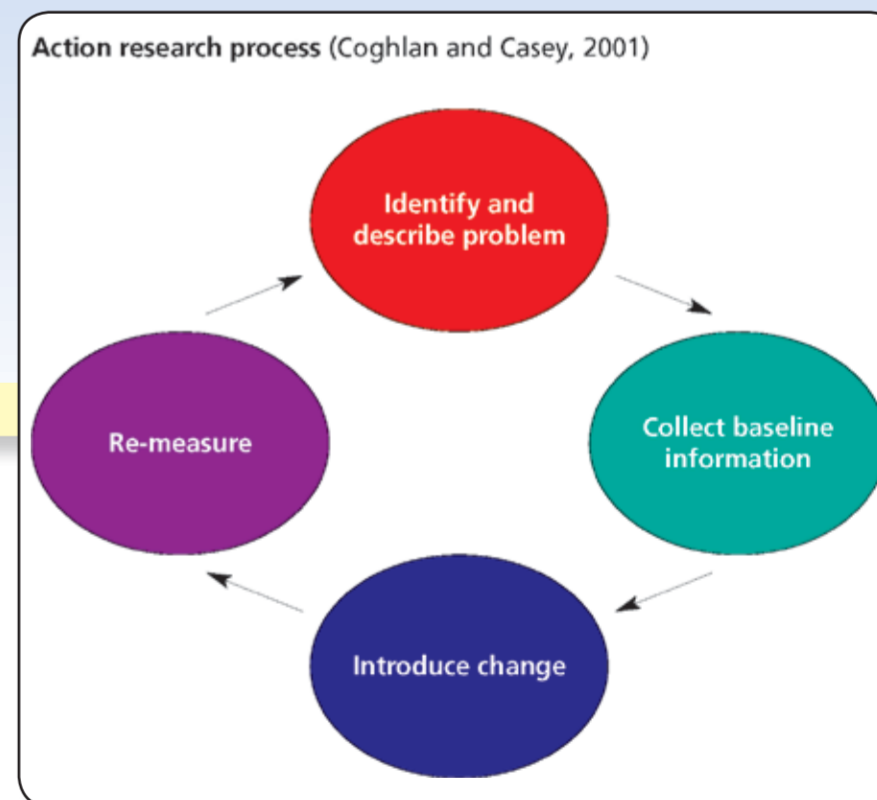
- Self selected groups and topics
- Flexibility in timings and location
- Having a process to follow
- Balance between inside/outside view
- Keeping notes
- Keeping going ...

Factors that hindered the projects

- Professional and physical silos - overcoming boundaries
- Complex networks and systems for validation of change
- Fluctuating 'energy' and protected time available for project work

Benefits of using an action research approach

- Direct involvement of staff in improving care
- Shared ownership and control
- New skills and experiences
- Promotes local engagement with and solution of organisational issues
- Inbuilt sustainability - knowledge transfer between research and practice



Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust