CultureCase

Using the arts to enhance communication in dementia care

This research was conducted by **Gill Windle** and **six others** at **Bangor University** and **four other institutions**.

Summary

This paper examined the results of four sessions of ‘Creative Conversations’: an arts-based intervention for care staff development. The 'Conversations' improved staff skills and confidence, enabling meaningful interactions that were ‘creative, ‘in the moment’, spontaneous and improvised’. This sort of training differs from more formal learning or simply fact-based learning, which are the norm for staff development in clinical and care settings. It gave staff the opportunity to reflect on their work and their relationships with each other and the patients in their care.

The 'Conversations' took place in 14 care homes in Wales

They were delivered as four two-hour sessions over a 12-week period. The 'Conversations' themselves comprised a range of activities (e.g. poetry, film, music, art making). They involved learning or being provided with some artistic material like a poem or a photograph followed by discussion, sharing and a practical activity. The researchers interviewed 28 female care staff from all those who took part before and after the sessions in order to assess their impact.

There are three ways in which these schemes improve communication

The first is ‘learning through the arts’, meaning that the activities prompted staff to reflect on what actually constituted quality communication, with the

artistic nature of the exercise prompting staff to think more about the subtleties and nuances of verbal and non-verbal communication. The second is ‘enhancing creative approaches to care’, meaning that staff had the confidence to experiment and take a more pragmatic approach to activities with patients; and the third is ‘professional introspection’, meaning that they gained deeper appreciation of the perspectives of those around them, and a sense of what contributions they were making as carers to others.

Keywords

interview **staffing** **dementia** **UK**

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