

Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices in Sydney West Abstract

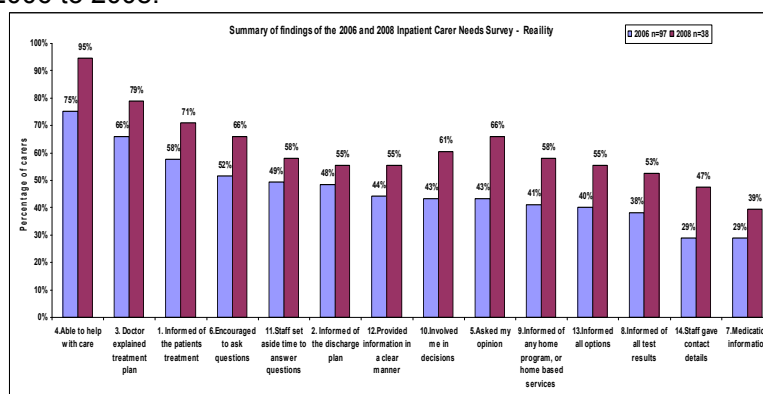
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Following the implementation of the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices model significant improvement ($p < 0.0001$) in carer experience has been achieved at Nepean hospital from 2006 to 2008.



Utilising the core principles of clinical practice improvement methodology a strategic model for improving the way carers are identified, supported and communicated with was developed. A number of baseline measures were undertaken in 2006 to ascertain current work practice including:

1. Carer Need Survey
2. Audit of the Patient Assessment on Admission form
3. Pre Carer Awareness Training staff questionnaire

Results of baseline data collected in 2006 indicated that carers have high expectations and that on average less than 50% of these expectations were being met. A guidance team was formed and in partnership appropriate staff were identified to undertake carer awareness training. Appropriate resources were developed including:

- SWAHS Carer Information Kit
- Carer Information board poster and
- Carer Information Resource folder for staff.

The implementation of the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices Model has demonstrated a number of outcomes for staff, carers and the SWAHS Carer Program. In summary, results indicate that there has been significant improvement between the reality of how carers perceive they are treated in 2008 compared with 2006 ($p < 0.0001$). In particular, carers reported considerable improvement in being able to help care for the patient and in staff providing them with their contact details. There have been a number of other outcomes including distribution of 450 SWAHS Carer Information Kits in 3 target wards at Nepean hospital.

When carers are identified early in an admission, there is an increased opportunity for them to be involved in acute health practices and decision making processes. Their caring role can be formally acknowledged and their contribution to the provision of health care to the patient and society valued. This strategic model is now being rolled out across clinical networks throughout the AHS.

Background

The NSW Carers Program is a NSW Government initiative. It was developed to complement the support services already being provided by the NSW and Australian Governments for carers and the people they care for. Funds are allocated through NSW Health to Sydney West Area Health Service for the Sydney West Carer Program. By placing Carer Program staff in each of the 8 area health services, NSW Health aimed to:

- Increase the responsiveness of health services to the needs of carers and
- Improve carers access to appropriate services both within and external to health.

In line with this brief the Sydney West Carer Program has trialed several strategies and initiated projects to date to improve the way acute facility staff identify, communicate, involve, inform and support carers.

This paper details some of the outcomes achieved for carers through implementation of the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices Model since 2006 at Nepean Hospital.

Developing a framework of carer support within Sydney West that is inclusive, collaborated, holistic and communicated across the care continuum is the overarching aim of the Sydney West Carer Program. Raising awareness of carers needs across the area, from the Chief Executive to workers at the coal face has been a priority for the program since its inception. Working strategically at various levels of the organisation in terms of initiating projects that work to support each other, are resource effective and that have synergy with other Area Health Service priorities including;

- Teamfirst
- Carefirst
- Redesign
- Consumer, Carer and Community Participation and more recently,
- Care Navigation and
- 'Essentials of Care' has also been an important consideration for the program.

It should also be noted that the Sydney West Carer Program is not a 1:1 carer support service. From its initiation, the program has set out not to replicate the role of any other health care service provider, but to support the work and roles of other health carer workers both internally and externally to the health system to improve carer access to information and services.

Aim

To improve the responsiveness of an acute health facility to the needs of carers. In particular to identifying carers and providing them with information, support and involving them in acute health practices.

Nature of the problem

Carers provide invaluable assistance to the people they care for and save the community in excess of \$2.6 billion a year. NSW Health identified that more support and greater access and information about services both internal and external to health should be provided to carers.

There are many competing demands for the time and energy of health staff in today's technically driven and time poor environment. Through the implementation of the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practice model, the Sydney West Carer Program aimed to provide health staff with:

- Education
- Training
- Tools
- Resources to assist them to identify carers and provide them with information about support services.

Extent of the problem

To determine current practice in relation to carer support and to give carers an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience a number of baseline measures were undertaken including;

1. Carer need Survey (2006)

Asked carers to report how they expected to be supported in relation to 14 different aspects of a patients care verse the reality of an episode of care.

2. Audit of the Patient Assessment on Admission form

To determine whether health staff utilise the form to document the name and contact details of a patients carer and

3. Pre training staff questionnaire

To determine health staffs knowledge and awareness of carers and services to support them prior to attending carer awareness training.

Results of baseline data collected in 2006 indicated that carers have high expectations. Feedback from carers indicated that on average less than 50% of these expectations were being met. In relation to documentation, established procedures to collect carer information were not used routinely and there was poor compliance with completion. In addition, staff reported that they thought it was important to know if a patient had a carer but that they did not seek them out to provide them with information routinely.

Planning and implementing solutions

Utilising the core principles of clinical practice improvement methodology a strategic model for improving the way carers are identified, supported and communicated with was developed.

In order to facilitate culture change at various levels of the organisation the Sydney West Carer Program sought endorsement and support for the model from both internal and external partners. Internal partners included:

- Director Strategy and Planning, Director of Nursing, Nurse Unit Managers, Allied Health Managers, Graphic design and health staff.

External partners included:

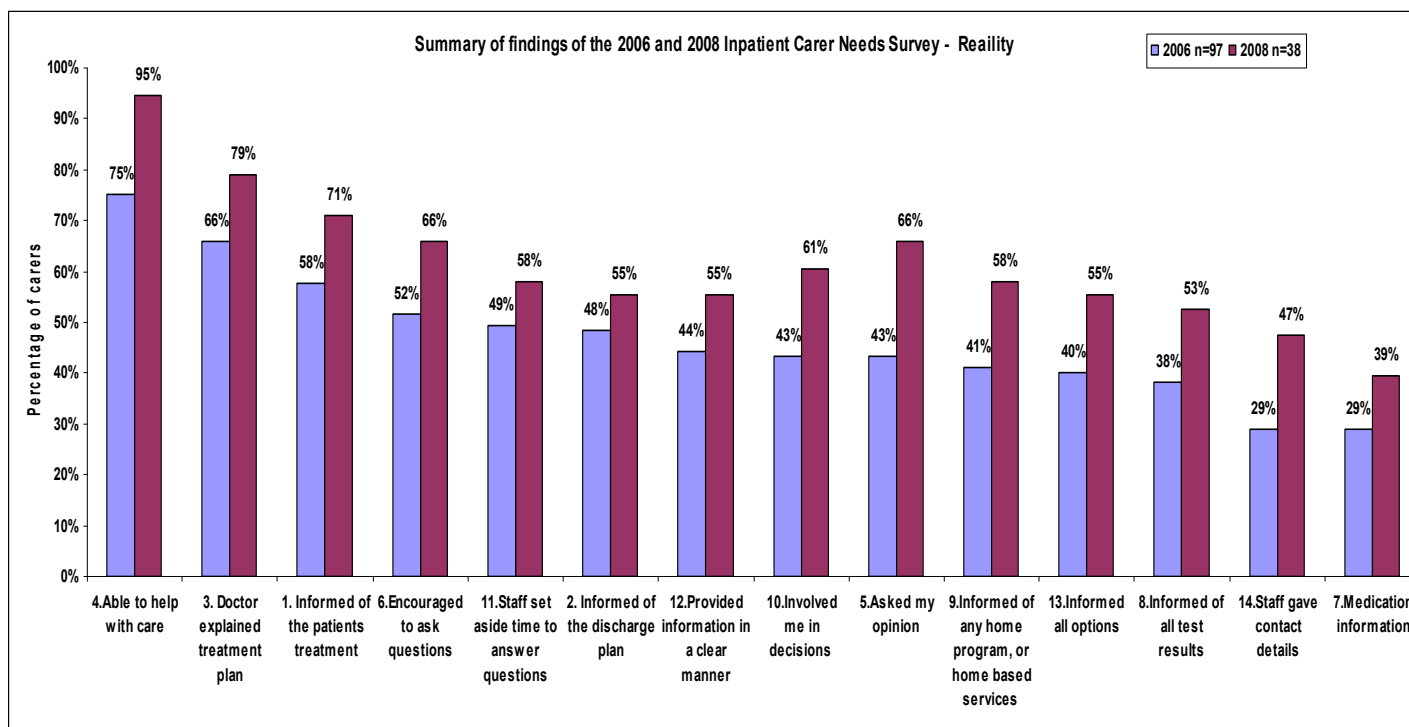
- Carers NSW
- Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre managers

A guidance team was formed and in partnership with senior nurse leaders appropriate staff were identified to undertake Carer Awareness Training. Training focused on involving carers in acute health practices and brainstorming strategy ideas and procedures together that would assist health staff to do this. Appropriate resources were developed including the Sydney West Carer Information Kit and a carer information resource folder for staff.

Numerous strategies were implemented over a 12-24mth period following the Carer Awareness Training to support carer identification and dissemination of information to carers. Strategies implemented included:

- Carer identification on admission procedures (pink dot procedure)
 - Using pink magnetic dots to signify to health care team that the patient has a carer.
- Formalised procedure for distribution of Sydney West Carer Information Kits including, Young and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer information kits.
 - Once identified the carer is given an information kit and this is recorded. Monthly distribution totals are reported to senior level SWAHS management committees.
- Development and erection of Carer Information Board Posters
 - Raise awareness of carers for staff and carers alike.
- 'Does your patient have a Carer?' A4 laminated card.
 - Prompt staff to identify
- 'Equipment used in the Intensive Care Unit to care for your loved one'.
 - Prepare carers and family members for visiting a loved one in Intensive Care Unit. An example of the individual nature of strategies implemented and their strategic significance.

Outcomes and Evaluation



A repeat carer need survey was conducted in 2008 on wards 4C, 5A and 5B at Nepean Hospital. These wards were actively involved in the uptake of carer identification practices. Please see graph above for comparison of findings. In summary, results indicate that there has been significant improvement between the reality of how carers perceive they are treated in 2008 compared with 2006 ($p < 0.0001$). In particular, carers report considerable improvement in being able to help care for the patient and in staff providing them with their contact details. There have been a number of other outcomes including:

- Distribution of 450 SWAHS Carer Information Kits in target wards 4C, 5A and 5B at Nepean hospital.
- In consultation with carers a review of the Sydney West Carer Information Kit including information about Rights and Responsibilities, Code of Conduct and the Charter. It is anticipated that distribution procedures will be streamlined across the area to support rollout of this valuable resource for carers and staff in 2009-2010.
- Development of Emergency Respite Pathway for carers
 - Guidelines and a tool for health staff to facilitate increased awareness and timely referral for patients for emergency respite in the event that the carer presents to an emergency department / health facility. This tool has been developed in partnership with the managers from Commonwealth Respite and Carelink centres within Sydney West and has the potential to impact upon avoidable hospital admissions and will also be suitable for use by external emergency service providers (ambulance and police).
- Carer Liaison Nurse pilot
 - Role offered support to ward staff identifying carers and an opportunity for carers to participate in a carer profile interview and free health screen.

Sustaining change

The provision of timely support to carers is creating better patient and carer journeys at Nepean Hospital. A large team of health staff committed to enhancing the support provided to carers has been established. The implementation of strategies to support existing admission procedures has precipitated an increase in the numbers of carers identified and provided with a carer information kit. These procedures are now part of current work practice. Data collection twelve months on at Nepean Hospital indicates that 3 target wards involved in the implementation of the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices Model have sustained their carer identification and carer information kit distribution, demonstrating sustainability of the model.

Future scope

The Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices Model has verified that when given appropriate training, resources and support, health staff are better equipped to identify, support and involve carers in acute health practices. Outcomes reported demonstrate that the Enhancing Carer Friendly Health Practices Model is suitable for implementation in any other acute / community facility in NSW. More importantly strategies trialed are tested, their effectiveness measured and their ability to be rolled out on a larger scale applied to improve the patient and carer journey.