The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Newcastle University

Evaluating the feasibility of delivering an alcohol screening programme within an endoscopy hospital department

Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals Trust, in partnership with Newcastle University, designed a pilot programme to assess how feasible it would be to include alcohol screening and brief advice into everyday routine health assessments.

"Hospital senior management and wider stakeholders were passionate about implementing NICE public health guidance to provide a health improving opportunity to their patients."

Gill O'Neill, Public health Specialty Registrar, Newcastle University: Institute Health and Society

Embedding alcohol screening and brief advice into routine clinical practice

Evidence shows that screening the adult population for risky alcohol consumption, and providing feedback and brief advice, results in a reduction in the amount of alcohol they consume. NICE's public health guidance on alcohol-use disorders recommends both these practices, and that alcohol brief interventions should be implemented within hospital settings.

While there is strong evidence for the effectiveness of alcohol screening and brief interventions, there is less evidence on the feasibility of routinely implementing these actions in healthcare settings

As a result, Newcastle University decided to evaluate how alcohol screening and brief advice could be embedded into everyday clinical practice as part of routine health assessments.

The evaluation is being undertaken within an endoscopy department at Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals Trust (NUTH), due to the association between gastrointestinal disease and risky alcohol consumption.

NUTH hosts a multi-disciplinary public health trust group, which provided a solid foundation for introducing alcohol screening and brief advice as part of routine clinical care.

Evaluating the process of implementation

Before the evaluation started, NUTH participated in a pilot project to establish the levels of confidence and commitment among hospital staff in delivering alcohol screening within routine health assessments. Initial findings showed that after training, staff were more confident and committed to deliver alcohol brief interventions to patients.

Newcastle University used these findings to develop a more structured evaluation, where the main outcome is to determine whether professional behaviour change has demonstrated successful implementation.

The evaluation process includes:

- understanding barriers and enablers to professional behaviour change
- shadowing patient pathways
- staff questionnaires and focus groups
- staff training
- production of brief advice tools
- a 12-week implementation pilot
- analysis of outcomes and development of recommendations

Engaging stakeholders by promoting the benefits of using NICE guidance

Learning points include:

- a shared strategic vision of 'making every patient contact a health improving opportunity' which led to a positive view about including alcohol screening and brief advice into routine health assessments
- hospital champions, such as senior nurses and consultants, were essential when promoting the benefits of implementing new evidence-based practice within an already busy clinical environment
- focus groups and questionnaires allowed staff concerns to be raised early in the process, and for barriers to be discussed in training
- training improved the knowledge and confidence among staff in discussing alcohol with general patients attending the unit. Feedback showed the training provided greater appreciation of the benefits of screening patients for risky alcohol use
- engaging the whole endoscopy department has bred a sense of ownership and trust
- conducting the evaluation within an academic setting provided opportunities to promote this project, and disseminate its findings more widely

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