Report on a Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) Clinical Needs Assessment in Old Age Psychiatry Acute Inpatient Units

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Background
There is a well established high prevalence of language, communication and swallowing impairments among older adults with mental health problems 1,2,3,4. Very few patients are diagnosed with language, communication and swallowing impairments as inpatients.

Surrey and Borders Partnership (SABP) does not currently employ or commission any SALT service.

No current screening process for SALT needs for inpatients

The northwest region of SABP has two inpatient wards:
•Hayworth House: 18 bedded mixed sex dementia unit
•Spenser Ward: 20 bedded mixed sex functional unit

A decision was made to conduct a clinical needs assessment for a SALT service at these units

Aims
1. To provide an estimate of the point prevalence of language, communication and swallowing needs among older adults using inpatient services
2. To provide evidence of a clinical need for SALT provision within inpatient services for older adults

Methods
Two senior SALTs with expertise in communication difficulties in mental health disorders were invited to carry out assessments on a random sample of patients at the two units over a three day period.

A random sample of 21 patients was selected from the occupied beds on each unit at the time of the study.

The assessment which was carried out by both SALTs

Demographic information and ICD-10 code were recorded

Scoring and evaluation of performance were undertaken immediately following the assessment session

Where appropriate a referral was made to local SALT services

Results
20 of the 21 (95%) participants were found to have impairment across communication and swallowing domains

9 (43%) needed immediate referral to local SALT services

None had been identified by the treating team as having clinically significant SALT needs

Conclusions
Speech, language, communication and swallowing problems were highly prevalent in this sample of older adults.

These impairments are significantly under-recognised.

A need has been identified to provide a comprehensive and tailored SALT service for older adults in inpatient units in SABP.

Such a service could have significant benefits for patients in SABP.

Further research is currently in progress to assess the level of SALT needs in a community sample

References

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