

Project

Lulla Dolls - Relieving stress and anxiety in hospital

Team	Dementia Care Team, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, Elaine Lindfield, Katherine Smith, Gary Burnham-Jones, Alison Tucker, Jennilee Phillips, Lydia Thurger
Contact for further information	Gary Burnham-Jones, gary.burnham-jones@nhs.net
KSS DCIN Fund	September 2018: Award £5,000



Background

Being admitted to hospital can be very distressing for people living with dementia and data shows that stays in acute hospitals for people with dementia last longer. Elaine Lindfield and Kathryn Smith from East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust pitched to trial an intervention to reduce distress and agitation for people living with dementia who are admitted into hospital.

‘Care teams are always looking for ways to comfort and reassure people’ Elaine Lindfield, Dementia Care Lead at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, who led the project.

This project aimed to test the use of ‘Lulla Dolls’, which had successfully been used with premature babies, to provide comfort for distressed patients during their time in hospital. Lulla dolls play an imitation of real breathing and a heartbeat and it was anticipated that they may provide comfort to some dementia patients during their hospital stay.

What happened

The trial ran from March ‘19 to September ‘19. Project initiation included, developing protocols, agreeing infection control procedures, briefing staff and devising evaluation forms. The project was promoted across the Trust. The dolls were donated to the project by the company who produces them and therefore the improvement fund was used to pay for an administrator to run and monitor the project.

See Elaine and Kathryn’s pitch at the KSS Dementia Care Improvement Network’s 1st Network Event held in September 2018 here: <https://youtu.be/OhRP15zByTY>

Gary Burnham-Jones from the Dementia Care Team at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust gave feedback on the project on behalf of the original project team.

- Project initiation and protocols – during the project set-up, strict criteria had been established for patient eligibility to participate in the trial. This resulted the project team not being able to identify an adequate number of suitable patients during the trial period
- Staff engagement – the project required the active participation of the ward staff. They were reluctant to take ownership of and responsibility for the dolls, in addition to completing cumbersome and time consuming project paperwork.
- Engaging the family and carers of participating patients was a challenge. Many families were not keen on seeing older family members with dolls as they felt it infantilised them.
- Staff turnover and continuity hampered the project. The team leader retired during the project, which had started later than originally planned and unexpected sickness of other team members and resulting staff turnover meant that it was difficult to maintain engagement and commitment to the approach.

Learning

Lessons were learned about how to approach this kind of intervention in future, particularly:

- Choosing the right setting - hospitals see the most acutely unwell patients, have strict infection control and governance procedures. They may not be the best environment to first test the effectiveness of this approach to reduce stress and anxiety in people living with dementia. It would be simpler to transfer the approach, having been found to be successful in another setting first
- Staff time and engagement is key - reduced staffing levels meant that there was less time or enthusiasm from staff in engaging in the intervention.

The project team recommend starting with a smaller less formal study like a PDSA cycle first. This would identify challenges early on as well as helping to streamline the protocols and evaluation criteria. It would also build staff confidence and engagement in the intervention which would be necessary for any expansion and roll out.

See Gary Burnham-Jones from the Dementia Care Team at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust gave feedback on the project at the KSS DCIN 3rd Network Event held in November 2019 <https://youtu.be/TqF-pfwOSSE>