



The use of Talking Mats® approach to facilitate improved communication with older adult patients who have communication support needs or Alternative or Augmentative Communication (AAC).

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Introduction

Finding out **“what matters?”** to people using health and care services is crucial to delivering safe, effective, person-centred care.

1. Communication is a basic human right.
2. To find out what matters to people it is essential to be able to communicate effectively.
3. A Right to Speak published in 2012 set out 8 recommendations to improve provision to those who have communication support needs or Alternative or Augmentative Communication.

When verbal communication is impaired it is essential that health and care staff is enabled to engage and communicate as effectively as possible using a variety of approaches and methods.

In the monthly improvement meeting with two clinical teams at the Mansionhouse Unit, at the Victoria Infirmary nursing staff shared their experience of the difficulties that they regularly encounter when communicating with patients with Dementia.

What are we trying to accomplish?

The aim of the project was:

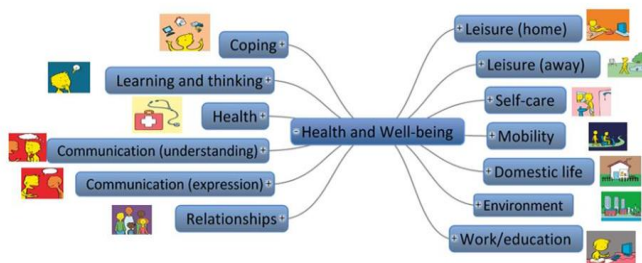
1. To test the Talking Mats® approach to explore how this could facilitate more effective communication when used with people with dementia, to find out **“what matters?”** and how this information could more effectively contribute to the patients plan of care and other nursing documentation such as the “Getting to Know Me” document .
2. To inform the provision of recreational activity available on the ward.

In partnership with the Project Manager for the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Project, the Talking Mats® team were commissioned to work with the two nursing teams.



What changes can we make to result in improvement?

The Talking Mats® approach is a visual framework that uses picture symbols to interact and helps people with a communication difficulty to communicate more effectively. It uses three sets of picture communication symbols – topics, options and a visual scale – and a space on which to display these. Some of the symbol sets include categories such as leisure and environment, communication, health and well-being, eating and drinking and social care.



How do we know that change is an improvement?

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff and direct feedback from patients, emphasised the value of using techniques like Talking Mats® to get to know the person.

“It (Talking Mats) has shown the person behind the dementia and shown how her memory is still there for many things. She was able to talk about what she liked doing in the past and voice her opinion even now on certain topics e.g. religion and the TV.”

“Talking Mats helps me identify exactly what activities the patients like to do, instead of everyone always doing the same things.”

“It was very stimulating for the both of us (interviewer and interviewee) to be able to spend time together and have a remarkable conversation... She was smiling and laughing and enjoying the activity.”

Key Benefits and Learning

The Talking Mats® approach:

- ✓ Is an effective communication tool when used with people with dementia.
- ✓ Is valued by staff as an easy to use and accessible tool.
- ✓ Has enabled nursing staff to provide a more person-centred and individualised approach to care provision in the ward.
- ✓ Has assisted staff to find out patients’ views and personal preferences, which has not been disclosed or identified through other communication and assessment processes.
- ✓ Has enabled the staff to involve patients in the planning of their care more effectively

Reference:

A Right to Speak (2012) <http://www.gov.scot/resource/0039/00394629.pdf>

Talking Mats® <http://www.talkingmats.com/>