

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Enhancing Volunteers' Communication by Creative Communication Skills Training

Background

Communication is a core component of palliative and end-of-life care. The role of volunteers is growing. Sufficient communication skills training should be available for volunteers as they provide support to the patients and their families. Everyone should feel confident when dealing with sensitive communication.

Aim

To establish that a concise educational intervention improves volunteers' confidence to participate and to undertake sensitive conversation when required to support patients and their families during their journey to discover what's important to them.

Method

A bespoke session was created for a group of thirty volunteers as it was recognised that effective communication must take place when involving and supporting individuals and those important to the patient to reduce missed opportunities to resolve important concerns and encourage a sense of control being achieved.

Results

Volunteers' confidence to participate and undertake conversations improved following an educational session. Pre-session and post-session quiz highlighted improved: understanding of what communication is from 24/30(80%) to 30/30(100%), why it is important to recognise cues from 20/30(67%) to 28/30(93%), more awareness of the type of questions asked to facilitate effective communication from 18/30(60%) to 26/30(87%). It also demonstrated enhancements of the importance of utilising silence from 12/30(40%) to 25/30(83%) and the power of summarising from 14/30(47%) to 26/30(87%). Additionally, volunteers' confidence levels presented greater understanding of the importance of confidentiality from 25/30(83%) to 30/30(100%) and the difference between sympathy and empathy from 14/30(47%) to 28/30(93%).

Conclusion

Inspired and involved volunteers feel more confident and are more likely to manage sensitive conversations when dealing with patients and those important to them. These sessions highlighted the importance of appreciation for volunteers, their life knowledge and lived experience and generated lively discussions regarding benefits and barriers associated with their role. There is a greater need to involve and educate volunteers in palliative and end of life care.

