



“KEEPING THINGS FLOWING” FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH INVESTIGATING THE PRACTICE MODEL FOR A RURAL DEMENTIA OUTREACH SERVICE



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BACKGROUND

Currently 70% of the 320,000 Australians with dementia live in the community. The number of people with dementia is projected to increase by 39% this decade. It is timely therefore to investigate models of service delivery that provide support to this important target group. There is a dearth of literature about effective models that enable the advances in intervention and management to be delivered to people living at home. The author of this paper is a social worker and team leader of a rural dementia outreach service, who has undertaken this research project supported by NSW Health.

GOAL

In a time of increasing population pressure and national policy changes the far north coast Dementia Outreach Service needs to continually review the nature and extent of its core business. With increasing demand for service stretching the Dementia Outreach Service’s finite resources, it also has to review whether there are better ways of delivering service. To inform such reviews and establish good practice, the Service needs to articulate its practice model and identify the knowledge and skill base on which that model sits. The research goal therefore is to investigate the practice model of this rural dementia outreach service to enable the Service to make informed decisions about how it responds to service constraints.

METHODOLOGY

Participatory action research methodology has enabled staff, community agencies and experts to contribute to the study and allowed the researcher to be a participant in the research. Data were collected through four focus groups and service records. A review of literature, policy, funding, demography and workforce contextualised the study.

RESULTS

Data analysis has been an iterative process with thematic analysis from the preceding group feeding back into subsequent groups. The findings are in four areas. The first area identifies the influences that the broader context has had on the Service, including population increase, policy changes and challenges in the health sector. The second area describes a practice model which identifies target groups, theoretical foundations, pillars of practice, core activities and the “enablers”. The third area explores the knowledge and skill base of the service and the highlights the importance of clinical expertise and the multidisciplinary team. The fourth area lists the shortfalls of the Service.

CONCLUSION

A practice model is described for a clinically-based, community-positioned, multidisciplinary dementia outreach service in the Australian rural context. Multiple external determinants are identified that have shaped the development of the model. Flexibility and responsiveness are key for building a cohesive sector response, for maintaining person-centred care, and for “keeping things flowing” for people living with dementia.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on ‘view completed projects’

Atosha Clancy is a social worker and team leader of the Dementia Outreach Service. She is an experienced clinician, providing individual and group services to people living with dementia and their families. Atosha chairs the far north coast Dementia Pathways Forum and works with the community services to build a cohesive sector response for people living with dementia.



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