



Developing a Family Support screening tool to identify safeguarding risk at referral

The Family Support Team at St Richard's Hospice has identified an increase in safeguarding and complexity in client referrals through the pandemic to the present day. In many cases, complexities are not picked up at referral stage but identified at assessment or provision of specialist palliative or bereavement support.

This results in unnecessary delays, with some clients directed to the wrong service and having to repeat their story in order to access the correct support. The Family Support Team wanted to develop a screening tool to identify risk and safeguarding concerns at referral and ensure clients are directed to the correct support.

How does the screening tool work?



A referral is received by the Gateway Team over the phone, face-to-face, or via email.

A staff member uses the screening tool to gather information about the person, including a variety of potential risk factors such as:

- Has the person had suicidal thoughts or ideation?
- Has the person used substances to cope?
- Has the person felt at risk from others?

Each risk factor is given a traffic light rating.



Red for significant risk, needing urgent assessment



Amber for a level of non-immediate risk, urgent assessment required



Green for non-existent or very limited risk, requiring non-urgent assessment

The person's ratings determine how quickly they may be assessed to begin accessing support. A person with red and amber risk would be fast-tracked for urgent assessment.

Those with green risk factors are marked for non-urgent assessment.

How did we develop the screening tool?

Phase one: a steering group of Family Support Team professionals set up to research different screening and assessment tools

Phase two: a draft screening tool developed and trialled for three months in the Gateway Team, the hub of all new referrals into the hospice

Phase three: evaluations of the screening tool gathered from the Gateway Team and adjustments made to the screening tool

Phase four: Review the changes made to the screening tool

What are our results so far?

The screening tool was evaluated after three months and 12 months using a questionnaire shared with the Gateway Team.

Feedback from the questionnaire was used to adapt and improve the screening tool.

The scoring method used in the screening tool was replaced by a traffic light system to highlight risk.

Questions were adapted and re-worded to ensure they collated relevant information.

Conclusion

Evaluation of the screening tool shows a positive impact on identifying safeguarding risks at the point of referral.

It has had a positive impact on ensuring referrals are allocated effectively and in a timely manner. Evaluations also highlighted the tool enabled staff to explore safeguarding issues and risk in more depth at referral stage.

A challenge of the screening tool is that some staff lack confidence and are nervous about asking some of the questions. This demonstrates additional training is required to build experience and confidence in this area.

References

1. Warwick Edinburgh Mental Health Well-Being Scale. User Guide version 1. Retrieved from Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWS) (corc.uk.net)
2. Relf M, Machin L, Archer N. Guidance for bereavement needs assessment in palliative care second edition. Hospice UK

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