



South West London
Academic, Health and Social Care
 System

Case Studies- Series 3

Audiology Outreach in Care Home Settings

Figures show that 71% of people over 70 in the UK experience some level of hearing loss; often resulting in feelings of social isolation that seriously impact their health and wellbeing. Croydon Hearing Resource Centre (CHRC) regularly visit housebound people in their own homes to help with these issues. But how best to reach residents of the 150 care homes in the area? Last year SWLS funded an innovative pilot project to find out.

Accessing Croydon's Care Home Population

Specialist staff from CHRC test and assess people's hearing, check, re-tube their hearing devices, and look for build-ups of ear wax that affect their hearing. But when clients move into care or nursing homes, these basic services and regular contact often breaks down.

"For years we've been trying to get more established in these settings; but nobody wanted to pay. So we were thrilled to receive the SWLS small grant."

David Rose, CEO, Croydon Hearing Resource Centre



The funding from SWLS finally enabled David and his team to trial a new, more proactive approach at Hall Grange Residential Care Home and Whitgift House Nursing Home. CHRC would arrange set sessions for a qualified audiologist to visit and deliver the whole service on-site. And as well as assessing all residents in order to offer appropriate support, whether they had hearing aids or not, the CHRC staff/audiologist would also train staff in basic hearing aid maintenance.

'Making best practice accepted practice'

Obstacles to On-Site Support

Audiologist Andrea Jackson started visiting the care homes in October 2015. Some residents were already known to CHRC, but the majority had not had a proper hearing test since moving into the home. And whilst only nine people in total in both homes needed and wanted a new hearing aid fitted, the assessments revealed another widespread and pressing need.

“The biggest surprise was that 50% of people had badly impacted wax in their ears; which had a profound effect on their hearing. This was especially surprising considering the nursing home had a GP and qualified nurses who would regularly check for wax.”

The unanticipated extent of this issue caused considerable delay to the project, as irrigation/syringing and micro-suction had to be delivered by a bought-in private provider (often over two or three sessions). They also had to contend with a shorter time slot than expected in which to see residents; two and a half hours in the morning amidst various other activities including hairdressing appointments.

Once the practical work was complete the team began training staff on how to insert the aid correctly, maintain, and re-tube hearing aids, as well as a wider awareness of the issues facing hearing impaired residents. The

majority of staff at the two sites were open to the opportunity; but arranging training around shift work schedules prolonged the project even further.

Yet despite these setbacks, when the project’s outcomes and impact were eventually assessed there were clear benefits to both residents and staff.

Outcomes and Recommendations for Future Development

Offering audiology services and training at care homes was shown to be a significantly shorter, more cost-effective, and efficient pathway than currently provided in hospitals or other acute settings. The final report found that it was ‘less intrusive, stressful and time consuming for residents’, reduced pressure on GPs, hospitals, and ENT clinics, and saved care homes time and money organising transport and support for appointments. Also as well as supporting the viability of this approach the pilot also revealed areas for improvement, including:

- Run follow-up and refresher training sessions for care home staff
- Specialised audiologist also trained to do micro suction, irrigation/syringing
- Screen residents as soon as possible to ensure early intervention
- Employ a full-time audiologist who can work across a cluster of care homes

“In terms of providing a service for our ageing population I think this is the way to go. Will the NHS or care homes actually pay for it? We will see if the NHS take it forward. But at least we now understand the issues, and the opportunities.”

David Rose, CEO, Croydon Hearing Resource Centre

Small Grants, Lasting Impact

Small Grants is a programme that supports collaborative projects across academic, health and social care sectors. This is a unique programme in south west London, helping to promote innovation that could potentially be of great benefit for the population of the area and even beyond.

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@SWLSsystem



GCAHSN@sgul.ac.uk



www.swlondonsystem.org
