

SETTING UP A WORK SHADOWING PROJECT WITHIN RENAL SERVICES – CAN IT WORK?

R Wolfenden
York Hospital

PROBLEM:- Patients with chronic renal failure are managed by healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines and typically have contact with a variety of hospital services, E.g. Outpatients, wards, administration, dietetics, social work, dialysis units. Staff from all of these disciplines and services were invited to attend An Integrated Renal Services Time Out Day, held to map a renal patient's care pathway. This mapping process revealed in detail the numerous activities, knowledge and skills required to achieve a quality service. It also identified the need for a better understanding of each team members' roles and skills.

PURPOSE:- As a result of the Time Out Day, setting up a formal Work Shadowing process was identified as one initiative that could be used by all those involved with renal health care to improve their knowledge of the skills and roles of other staff, with the ultimate aim being to provide a greater quality and continuity of service for patients.

DESIGN:- All disciplines within the Renal Team were requested to provide details of what they thought another staff member could gain by spending time shadowing them at work. An eye-catching poster explaining the Work Shadowing process was developed and included the following: rationale, proposed benefits, work areas / disciplines available to shadow, evaluation process, details of what each discipline could offer a potential shadower. Large scale posters were displayed in communal staff areas and smaller copies provided to individuals. The process of work shadowing was discussed and promoted at renal meetings and all staff were encouraged to participate. The length of work-shadowing sessions was agreed on an individual basis.

FINDINGS:- The work shadowing process is an ongoing project and all of the evaluation has been extremely positive. E.g. "Work shadowing helped me to realise the need to develop knowledge of the team in order to enhance patient care", "...better understanding of the roles of colleagues". However, to date, numbers of staff participating in the project has been small with lack of staff time being cited as the main limiting factor.

CONCLUSION:- This work shadowing project provides a valuable method of improving team working and communication by enhancing the knowledge of other team members roles and skills. The positive evaluation comments received indicate that the process is worth pursuing. We have sought financial support to address the barrier of lack of staff time and continue to highlight its importance by identifying work shadowing as an objective in staff members annual development reviews.

RELEVANCE:- Improving staff awareness of the knowledge and skills that their colleagues have is important team working and communication in order to promote continuity and quality of patient care and will underpin the forth coming National Skills for Health project. When planning such a project, it is important to recognise and address potential barriers in order to ensure its success.