



Choking Awareness Project

Background

Anyone can accidentally choke at any time. The risk of choking increases when someone is eating or drinking. People with swallowing difficulties and/or learning Disability have a further increased risk of choking (Thacker, 2007). Every year people with a learning disability die from choking while eating and drinking which could be prevented (Glover, (2010)).

Choking is “an acute episode in which the patient coughed incessantly or experienced a colour change (with inability to speak or cough effectively) while ingesting food or drink. The solid or liquid had to be expelled to terminate the event.”
Fioritti et al 1997

John is a service user with a learning disability, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and swallowing difficulties who experienced a number of choking events. He was referred to Speech and Language therapy and following a swallowing assessment received direct therapy to help him reduce his risk of choking. John felt that his positive experience of the speech and language therapy service saved his life. He was inspired to share his successful story to help other people reduce their risk of choking. Listening to John talking about his experience and what he learned brings the subject of choking to a human level. Innovation is not just around technology, it can be better ways of doing things. John could see that other service users would be safer if they knew about choking and it could help to save lives.

The project was successfully awarded money from the Public Health Agency (PHA) for a Patient and Public Involvement project (PPI) to develop John’s story into an educational DVD resource. The DVD is an accessible learning resource for people with a learning disability, their staff and carers. It aimed to help people know and understand choking and how to reduce the risk of choking. The DVD includes collaborative working across professionals who share their perspective on reducing the risk of choking. This includes Speech & Language Therapist, Community Nurse, day care worker, health improvement officer for oral health and social worker. As well as the accessible DVD we produced an easy read Information book, activities, posters and a choking awareness campaign song and music video. Please watch and share our ‘Help Stop Choking’ song on YouTube

<http://youtu.be/AEwDb3ZNkAc>

Pilot Project

We ran a pilot project to evaluate the ease of understanding and accessibility of the DVD and resources. The workshops were conducted over a 2 week period between the 15th of May and the 29th of May 2014. A total of 13 workshops were completed with a total of 140 participants. 11 carers, 40 service users, 85 staff and 4 who did not record their designation.

An easy read 10 question survey was developed for participants to self rate their awareness, knowledge, applied skills and confidence before and after the choking awareness workshop.

Results and Conclusions

The results of the survey show that the DVD and other easy read resources are effective, i.e. following the implementation all participants had an increased understanding of choking and ways to reduce risk.

This project is a service user's ambitious and innovative idea to decrease the risk of choking by encouraging safe eating behaviours, safe food choices and helping foster safe eating environments. The pilot shows evidence that the accessible information makes a difference. There is much evidence of the size of the choking problem this project tried to evaluate the extent to which an educational intervention is effective at ameliorating it.

John said "before I worked with speech and language therapy I didn't know choking was so serious. This is me telling my story and how I feel being through it (choking), even if I help one person it will be fantastic."

Care for service user safety is at the heart of this project with a motivation to improve services and the quality of care that's delivered every day. This innovative project will not only save lives and reduce harm but will make savings to the health service by reducing admissions to hospital.

John bagged one of the top prize at this year's Patient Safety and Care Awards in London under the category **Preventing Avoidable Harm**. Presenting the award, the judges said that this DVD should be used by all Learning Disability services across the UK as core training and awareness raising for both staff and service users.

Next steps

Lessons within the DVD are broad and we hope will have appeal across the health sector. This project has been awarded money from the BHSCT Health Improvement Consortium to develop 'Help Stop Choking' awareness website and mobile app as a digital solution to make the DVD and resources available to a wide audience.

References

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Thacker, A. A. (2007). Indicators of choking risk in adults with learning disabilities: A questionnaire survey and interview study. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 30 (15): 11312-1138.

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