

The registered nurse role within Health Visiting teams across five localities in Gateshead PCT in 2004

1. Background

The Public health agenda and the Public health role of health visitors is a potential driving force for this skill mix role. It could also be a potential strategy for recruiting future Health visitors, who would not only understand the diverse role of health visitors but would also be aware of the Organizations aims, objectives policies and procedures. Buckingham and Watson (1997) reported on the implementation of a similar skill mix role in the Isle of Sheppey, they highlighted the benefits of this implementation as:-

- Freed up Health visiting time to take the public health agenda forward.
- Health visitor open to develop other initiatives
- Could ease the transition and career progression towards health visiting thus contributing positively to recruitment and retention issues.
- Could ease current and potential shortages in health visiting
- Increased Quality of care delivered.

The introduction of this new skill mix role of within health visiting teams in Gateshead stemmed from a few catalysts for change which have made the potential usefulness of skill mix more acceptable to Health visitors, they also reflected the above benefits highlighted in Sheppey for example:- Workforce issues, increased workload, new government policy especially the public health agenda, Improving working lives, move to corporate teams and the experience of working with skill mix through the introduction of nursery nurses.

2. Developing a new role

We needed to set aims and measures before implementing this skill mix role therefore a Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle model for improvement was used to ask what we were trying to accomplish and would the change make any improvement to the service therefore provide value for money. The role was introduced as a one year pilot within two teams in Gateshead. Members of staff were involved at every stage of the pilot testing ideas (PDSA) and learning from mistakes. The pilot evaluated positively by those involved and this was shared with staff at the first PCT celebration event.

A report of the evaluation of the pilot was circulated to all health visitor bases. Again using the (PDSA) cycle model for improvement we agree to organise two focus groups involving front staff in planning the next cycle of change and to test

assumptions and feelings around the introduction of this skill mix role. A report was circulated to senior management who supported the implementation of this role in April 2004, five E grades were recruited for the five localities within Gateshead PCT.

3. Implementing the change

Champions were identified from front line staff who agreed to act as preceptors the aim of these champions was to drive forward and support the implementation of this role. Senior management and locality matrons supported the implementation of registered nurses within the five localities of the PCT.

Support networks were set up for the registered nurses and their preceptors; portfolios with learning outcomes and a set of competencies for immunisations group work, audit were developed by the preceptors and a locality matron. A further competency for the distraction-hearing test was later added to the preceptorship portfolio.

4. Key areas identified for role of registered nurse

Areas for further training/development were identified 'in consultation' with the registered nurses, preceptors and locality matrons; -

- Smoking cessation training
- Heart manual facilitation training
- Basic child protection training
- Continence assessment training
- Failure to thrive/ Family nutrition – link with nutritional assistants
- Distraction hearing test training- until discontinued
- Breast feeding management training

There was also agreement that the registered nurses, supported by health visitors or other professionals with the 'relevant expertise' should develop the following information packs for clients:-

- Breast feeding
- Healthy Lifestyle.
- Home safety- link with 'Whoops'
- First Aid- Childhood illness
- Head lice treatment and intervention
- Weaning
- 7 steps to healthy eating packs for adults- in partnership with dietetics dept and nutritional assistant.
- Collating information for community profiles
- Assisting the 'facilitation' of the 'whoops home safety groups' within different localities in Gateshead.

5. Evaluation of the role 6 months post introduction

An evaluation was carried out in 2005 the conclusion was that the lessons learnt from the initial pilot in 2003 provided a useful framework for the mentors and registered nurses to progress the role further. The Changes made to the Competencies, and learning outcomes of the newly developed Preceptorship Portfolio were viewed as positive. The Registered nurses and mentors felt that they had fully contributed to the further development of the role highlighting competences and training needs required.

The registered nurses themselves have found their development group and a peer clinical supervision group to be essential as they all without exception found the transition from working within an acute environment to the community environment difficult. There is was also a more positive attitude from health visitors towards the registered nurse role many viewing the role as essential to free up time; clients also appeared to accept and value the registered nurse as part of the team.

An annual report was introduced as a way of measuring the success of the role and what value for money the role provides it is intended that this would be an ongoing report.

6. New initiatives were highlighted in the 2005-2006 registered nurse Annual report

- Introduction of Whoops! Child Safety Groups within each locality facilitated by the registered nurse. Introduction in many areas of Monthly Weaning support Groups.
- Introduction of HELP groups (healthy eating lifestyle plan), encompassing 7steps to healthy eating- for example at Grassbanks H/C weekly sessions from 23/06/05 to 04/08/05.
- One Registered nurse has had an active part in working with the travelling communities team, designing a poster and leaflet to help signpost travelling families to health related services for example local doctors, dentists and chemists. As part of the travelling family's team one of the registered nurses has been assisting the team to organise a health orientated fun day with the general promoting public health messages and the role of the travelling team.
- A registered nurse has been working with a health visitor to identify the health needs of the population of a local Women's refuge.
- Involvement in local family health days in the South Locality of Gateshead.
- Involvement in a bottle exchange event in Gateshead central.
- Registered nurses led on the production of two accident prevention fact sheets and Posters.

- Registered nurse Involvement of the Implementation of a baby bites twelve week programme into the Ryton area. Which has been an innovative piece of work as previously only accessed in the Sure Start area. The programme includes baby massage, Whoops session, Weaning information, and various sessions discussing; returning to work, childcare, common childhood ailments, crying and sleeping.
- Three out of the five registered nurses recruited in 2004 have applied and been successful in obtaining sponsorship for BSc Honours in public health practice.

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Locality Matron