Forgotten? - dementia care in acute hospitals in the UK

Dementia affects an estimated 670,000 people in England, and the costs across health and social care and wider society are estimated to be £19 billion – both figures being set to rise with the ageing of the population.

What we did

We undertook a study to identify the proportion of patients being admitted for an acute condition that were not recognised as having dementia. Our objectives were to:

- Examine and quantify the variation in outcomes of care across UK hospitals.
- Estimate the potential cost savings if patients are identified correctly and given appropriate care.
- Develop a framework of standards and a dashboard to measure and monitor outcomes.

Methods

1. We examined patient-level data (Hospital Episode Statistics) for all admissions in 2010 and 2011 for patients aged over 45.
2. We linked data from April 2006 to the latest admission to examine whether previous admissions were accompanied with a diagnosis of dementia.
3. We compared outcomes of patients with dementia to those of non-dementia patients.
4. The analysis used standardised data to remove any differences between the two groups in respect of clinical condition (defined by 249 CCS groups), type of admission (elective/non-elective) and age band.

Results

- Approximately 3.5% of all patients had a diagnosis of dementia recorded for their latest hospital spell.
- A further 30% of patients actually had dementia but it was not recorded in the latest admission records.
- The total proportion of all admissions identified as people with dementia was about 6%.
- Average length of stay for patients with dementia was typically 25% longer than those without.
- Patients with dementia were over twice as likely to have a readmission following an elective admission, and overall mortality rates were higher.
- Patients with dementia were three times as likely to have a fall whilst in hospital compared to those without, doubling their length of stay.
- Fewer patients with dementia returned to their usual place of residence.

Conclusions

Our study found that patients with dementia:

- Are not recognised as having the condition on admission to hospital.
- Stay longer in hospital.
- Have more readmissions and higher death rates in hospital.
- Are liable to more falls, and subsequently less likely to return home.

We developed a framework of standards and dashboard to evaluate impact of care on outcomes. This is now being used in NHS hospitals to improve the care of patients with dementia.

Find out more

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