

THE VALUE OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT OF VULNERABLE OLDER PEOPLE

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by the Department of Health

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BACKGROUND

The Department of Health has commissioned the Personal Social Services Research Unit in Manchester to evaluate multidisciplinary assessments of older people being considered for nursing or residential home placement by social services. Experience in the UK and Australia has indicated that specialist multidisciplinary assessment of older people may result in more appropriate placement in nursing or residential homes, and the study aims to investigate this further.

PURPOSE

The project aims to evaluate the effect of a clinical contribution on the assessment process and to examine the costs and benefits of this multidisciplinary process for older people and their carers, as well as for health and social services authorities. As all previous UK studies of such assessment were undertaken prior to 1990, the research will shed light on the assessment process following the community care reforms in 1993 and contribute to the development of the new unified assessment process outlined in the NHS Plan.

DESIGN

This is a four year study which began in February 1998. Fieldwork has taken place with two local authorities - one urban and one semi-rural - with contrasting demographic characteristics and traditions of service provision for health and social care in the north-west of England.

Two hundred and fifty six older people currently residing in the community and being considered for nursing and residential home placement were randomly allocated into two groups. Both groups received a social services assessment and one group also underwent a specialist medical assessment from either a geriatrician or old age psychiatrist. The medical assessment

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The **Personal Social Services Research Unit** undertakes social and health care research, focusing particularly on policy research and analysis of equity and efficiency in community care and long term care and related areas, including services for elderly people, people with mental health problems and children in care. The Unit's work is funded mainly by the Department of Health.

The PSSRU Bulletin and publication lists are available free of charge from the PSSRU librarian in Canterbury (01227 827773) and on the Internet the Unit Web site can be found at <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/PSSRU/>. The PSSRU was established at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1974 and from 1996 has operated from three sites:

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was made available in a standardised and user-friendly format to care managers to assist them and their team managers in decisions about arrangements for the service user's long-term care.

In addition information was gathered from both groups on their physical and psychological health and functioning, quality of life and satisfaction with services used. Information from carers on carer burden, stress and satisfaction with service was also collected for both groups. Follow-up interviews are completed after six months to assess any changes in the service user and carer. Data on placement rates, service use and costs of both groups are collected over twelve months and analysed to explain any patterns of variation.

RESULTS

The age range of the 256 service users referred to the study is from 58 years to 100 years, the mean age being 83 years. Eighty four per cent were over 75 years. One hundred and eighty eight clients (73 per cent) were female and sixty eight (27 per cent) were male. The majority (70 per cent) were living alone in their own home when they were referred to the study. One hundred and twenty nine were allocated to the experimental group and have received a medical assessment. Sixty seven (52 per cent) of these assessments were completed by an old age psychiatrist and sixty two (48 per cent) were completed by a geriatrician.

PLANS FOR COMPLETION

The study is expected to be completed at the end of 2001. Analysis linking variations in client and carer characteristics and type of medical assessment will be undertaken on the completed data set to determine the effects of medical assessment on placement decisions at 6 and 12 months. Differences between the two groups on physical, psychological and social measures will be used to evaluate the success of the medical assessments. Cost data will inform evaluation as to the cost-effectiveness of the additional clinical assessment.

The PSSRU staff conducting this study are David Challis, Janine Williamson, Paul Clarkson and Jane Hughes at the PSSRU, University of Manchester, in conjunction with Professor Alistair Burns of the Department of Old Age Psychiatry, Withington Hospital, Manchester. Further information can be obtained from Paul Clarkson 0161 275 5674 or email: Paul.C.Clarkson@man.ac.uk
