

Further information

A more detailed version of this article is available as PSSRU Research Summary 34, www.pssru.ac.uk/pdf/rs034.pdf. For further information on the SAP study see the project outline at www.pssru.ac.uk/pdf/p060.pdf.

Implementing the Single Assessment Process: Key Findings from the Literature

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As part of a larger study of the Single Assessment Process (see page 10), PSSRU at Manchester were commissioned to review available literature concerning issues relevant to the SAP. This article presents some key findings.

Putting the individual at the centre of assessment

The SAP elevates the notion of person-centred care from a desirable idea to a central value within assessment. The literature on the practice of a variety of professionals involved in the assessment of older people, however, demonstrated that they did not share an understanding of this value and that even when upheld in theory, person-centred care was often not adhered to in practice.

Professional values and multidisciplinary working

The existence of different professional values or ideologies is identified in the literature as one issue impeding effective multidisciplinary working. Different professional perspectives and styles of working tend to produce differences in practice and in the way in which assessments are conducted. This has resulted in some entrenchment by professionals concerned to protect their roles and has served to hinder shared practice that might result in better outcomes for service users.

A further, linked, issue is the difficulty around the conceptualisation of 'need' in community care assessments voiced by a number of authors. Evidence from practitioner-based studies shows a lack of understanding of the concept of need and how this relates to service provision from the particular agency concerned. Such studies suggest that practitioners of different disciplines lacked a clear framework, both conceptually and practically, for undertaking needs assessments.

Developing structures to facilitate information sharing

The literature draws attention to the fact that a single and collaborative approach to assessment, involving multiple agencies but coordinated by the social services care manager, was the original intention behind the community care reforms. The evidence reviewed, however, suggests that such a pivotal approach was not fully established and that, instead, separate assessments, often with little sharing of information, have taken place. Breakdown in communication between professionals and agencies was found to be particularly pronounced at points of transition from one care situation to another, such as hospital discharge. This resulted in the repetition of the assessment process performed in hospital, once an older person returned home. The lack of successful structures to enable information exchange was closely linked to and frustrated by inter-professional mistrust.

The introduction of information technology was considered by the majority of those addressing this issue to have huge potential to overcome some of the structural obstacles to information sharing that have existed to date. However, they also acknowledge that this potential will not be fulfilled unless professional values and cultures also merge.