THE VALUE OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT OF VULNERABLE OLDER PEOPLE

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 this 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.

DESIGN

The study began in February 1998 and will last for three years. The fieldwork will be carried out in conjunction 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 seventy older people currently residing in the community, but not in hospital, and being considered for nursing or residential home
Placement will be randomly allocated into two groups. One group will receive the usual social services assessment and the other in addition will undergo a specialist medical assessment from either a geriatrician or old age psychiatrist. The medical assessment will be made available in a standardised and user-friendly format to care managers to assist them and their team leaders in decisions about arrangements for the service user’s long-term care.

In addition, information will be gathered from both groups of people on their physical and psychological health and functioning, quality of life and satisfaction with the service used. A follow-up interview at six months will repeat these measures to assess any changes. Data on placement rates, service use and costs of both groups will also be collected over twelve months and analysed to explain any patterns of variation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The PSSRU staff conducting this study are David Challis and Jane Hughes (both on 0161 275 5250) and Ashley Weinberg and Janine Williamson (both 0161 275 5227) at the PSSRU, University of Manchester, in conjunction with Professor Alastair Burns of the Department of Old Age Psychiatry, Withington Hospital, Manchester. The project secretary can be contacted on 0161 275 5391.