Volunteering Case Study 2018

Introduction

Ward volunteers Sara and Mindy are able to visit patients in hospital who are lonely and would like some company due to lack of visitors. Both are multilingual; including Urdu and Punjabi. As Health Board translators are primarily tasked with medical translation some patients can feel isolated and lacking in daily general conversation and our volunteers are occasionally assigned to specific wards to speak with specific patients.

Background / Baseline

Sara and Mindy were assigned to meet with Mrs S. On their first meeting, it became clear that Mrs S was indeed very lonely and isolated. Over the course of the week Mrs S often spoke of her family values and sharing teachings about life. The volunteers found their discussions very emotional and enjoyable as she reflected their grandmothers and mothers, due to the same language, values, teachings, and habits.

What happened - Intervention/activity

On subsequent visits the volunteers successfully encouraged Mrs S to eat and drink when she did not want to and also calmed her down when she seemed hysterical and confused. The nurses were having difficulty communicating with her and the volunteers were able to speak with her and find out the reason for her distress. Mrs S was clearly missing her family and was only willing to eat if her son came and fed her. As the volunteers had built up a rapport with her they were able to reassure her that her family would be visiting and she was loved by many people. With this support she slowly relaxed and partially returned to her normal self; eating and drinking, singing, telling stories with the overwhelming ethos of love and family.

Mrs S was moved to a rehabilitative hospital and the volunteers were approached and ask if they would like to follow her on her journey by the ward Consultant who could see the differences their interactions were having on her wellbeing. The volunteers have continued to visit her and she has been glad to see them. Following their visits other members of staff noticed a remarkable improvement in her wellbeing. They noted her hair was neat as the volunteers had braided it and she was sitting up and singing with them. As the volunteers do not drive they have been supported by the Volunteer co-ordinator with transport to visits to make it easier for them.

What changed?

The volunteers have reported that supporting Mrs S has made them very aware of the effects good communication can have on a patient’s health and wellbeing and how their multilingual abilities have helped her.

Mrs S herself expressed that being with good company lifted her spirits and she was more comfortable communicating in the language she prefers. Mrs S was able to share feelings and emotions that she would otherwise repress and therefore decreased her anxiety and a sense of loneliness.

Staff noted stark difference in Mrs S; less agitation and distressed behaviours, more fluid
and nutrition uptake, the girls phonetically wrote down easy questions in Punjabi “would you like a drink” etc so that staff could communicate more effectively.

**Lessons Learned and Actions Taken**

This has demonstrated the importance of multi lingual volunteers and the vital support communication social contact plays in patients well being.

The development of a case study to share with staff colleagues and future volunteers