PrescQIPP
Community Interest Company

Implementing NICE and SIGN guidelines in care homes and encouraging best practice

This bulletin sets out recommendations for keeping up-to-date with current evidence-based national guidance and gives advice on dissemination, implementation and review to ensure a high standard of care. This bulletin is aimed primarily at care home staff and anyone else involved in the implementation of National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) guidelines in care homes.

Recommendations

- Have a system in place for becoming aware of new guidance that has been published. This may involve signing up to receive regular updates or scheduling regular time to proactively look for new guidance.

- Assess published guidance to determine if it is relevant to care home staff and requires dissemination to make sure everyone is aware of it.

- Talk to your team about new and updated guidance and how to put it into practice.

- Have a discussion with your staff about whether the recommendations require any change to current practice.

- Identify key partners involved in implementing the guidance, for example the GP, community pharmacist, social services, Health Board or local Integrated Care System (ICS) and engage them in the process, if useful.

- Use audits to determine whether current practice is in line with guideline recommendations. This is particularly important if there is a suspicion that current practice is falling short of what is outlined by NICE or SIGN.

- Develop an action plan where improvements are necessary. This may include training and education and then an assessment of competency.

- Re-audit, where appropriate, to ensure that standards of practice have improved to the required level, compared with the initial audit results (the baseline).

- Hold refresher education and training sessions and re-assessment of competency as necessary, to ensure that targets are being met and the guidance is being put into practice, in order to maintain a high standard of safety and care.

NICE

NICE aims to improve outcomes for people using the National Health Service (NHS) and other public health and social care services.[1] They do this by producing evidence-based guidance and advice on a range of topics, developing quality standards and performance metrics and providing a range of information services.[1]

There are multiple clinical guidelines and quality standards applicable to care homes published by NICE. NICE guidelines provide recommendations across a defined area of care and NICE quality standards focus on a few key priorities within a defined area of care that are most likely to need improvement, along with providing information about how to measure progress.

NICE guidelines relevant to care homes include:

- Safeguarding adults in care homes [NG189][2]
- Delirium: prevention, diagnosis and management [CG103][3]
- Dementia: assessment, management and support for people living with dementia and their carers [NG97][4]
- People's experience in adult social care services: improving the experience of care and support for people using adult social care services [NG86][5]
- Transition between inpatient mental health settings and community or care home settings [NG53][6]
- Oral health for adults in care homes [NG48][7]
- Transition between inpatient hospital settings and community or care home settings for adults with social care needs [NG27][8]
- Older people with social care needs and multiple long-term conditions [NG22][9]
- Managing medicines in care homes [SC1][10]
- Falls in older people: assessing risk and prevention [CG161][11]
- Healthcare-associated infections: prevention and control [PH36][12]
- Mental wellbeing in over 65s: occupational therapy and physical activity interventions [PH16][13]
- Medicines optimisation: the safe and effective use of medicines to enable the best possible outcomes [NG5][14]
- Medicines adherence: involving patients in decisions about prescribed medicines and supporting adherence [CG76][15]
- Drug allergy: diagnosis and management [CG183][16]
- Nutrition support for adults: oral nutrition support, enteral tube feeding and parenteral nutrition [CG32][17]
- Pressure ulcers: prevention and management [CG179][18]

NICE quality standards relevant to care homes include:

- End of life care for adults [QS13][19]
- Dementia [QS184][20]
- Intermediate care including reablement [QS173][21]
- Transition between inpatient mental health settings and community or care home settings [QS159][22]
- Oral health in care homes [QS151][23]
- Falls in older people [QS86][24]
- Transition between inpatient hospital settings and community or care home settings for adults with social care needs [QS136][25]
- Medicines management in care homes [QS85][26]
- Delirium in adults [QS63][27]
- Infection prevention and control [QS61][28]
- Mental wellbeing of older people in care homes [QS50][29]

Implementing NICE guidance can help health and social care professionals ensure the care they provide is based on the best evidence available. It can also ensure they meet standards set by regulatory bodies and consider NICE guidance when making clinical decisions. It can empower all staff dealing with patient queries to have confidence in their approach to care and it can effectively target resources and efforts to the areas that offer the most significant health improvement.[30]

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) uses NICE guidelines as evidence to inform the inspection process in England.[31] NICE clinical guidelines cover the NHS in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.[32]

SIGN

In Scotland, evidence-based guidelines are produced by SIGN (the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network).[33]

SIGN guidelines relevant to care homes include:

- Management of osteoporosis and the prevention of fragility fractures [SIGN 142][34]
- Management of suspected bacterial lower urinary tract infection in adult women [SIGN 160][35]
- Management of chronic pain [SIGN 136][36]
- Risk reduction and management of delirium [SIGN 157][37]
- Pharmacological management of glycaemic control in people with type 2 diabetes [SIGN 154][38]
- Management of diabetes [SIGN 116][39]
- Care of deteriorating patients [SIGN 139][40]

Keeping up-to-date

Care homes should have a manageable system in place for keeping abreast of relevant NICE/SIGN guidance that has been published. This may involve signing up with NICE or SIGN to receive regular updates (both internal and external). It may also involve proactive review of guidance; for example, in response to an area for improvement being identified such as an increase in falls. This should include those that are existing, newly published and on the horizon or in development.

It is important to note that not all NICE/SIGN recommendations are intended for care home staff, with some recommendations being aimed at qualified health care professionals and social care staff. Care home staff are not expected to work outside their remit in implementing relevant guidance or quality standards.

Both NICE and SIGN websites give users the ability to view their published guidelines in order of most recent to see what is new. It is also possible to view guidelines that are in development, to allow horizon scanning of topics coming up.[33,41] NICE also allows users to subscribe to receive monthly updates in the form of NICE News.

Not all of the guidelines or information published will be applicable to care homes but it is important to regularly assess the relevance of published guidance to be aware of any new or updated information that requires dissemination among staff and a change in practice.

Dissemination

Liaise with relevant members of the team to determine an appropriate action plan for dissemination and implementation of relevant new or updated guidance. Keep track of how this has been disseminated among relevant staff members, for example, who has been made aware of new guidance and when using appropriate record keeping.

This might require making staff aware via team meetings, newsletters, emails, phone calls etc. This should include discussion with staff around how recommendations fit within current practice and any

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changes that are required, as appropriate, in the form of a SMART action plan to ensure that the goals set are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based.

Implementation

An audit is a good way to assess baseline current practice against guideline recommendations and determine whether any changes are required. Especially if there is a suspicion that current practice is falling short of what is desired.

Audit findings should be carefully reviewed to allow an action plan to be developed to make improvements, for findings that are below the level that is required. This may include training and education as part of the action plan and subsequent assessment of competency.

NICE has a range of resources to help with planning ahead for NICE guidance, understanding the current situation, and conducting improvement initiatives.[42]

It may also be useful to identify any key partners to support implementation, for example, the GP, Practice pharmacist, Pharmacy technician, community pharmacist, social services, Health Board, ICS and Primary Care Network (PCN) and engage them in the process.

The PrescQIPP Care Homes Virtual Professional Group meets regularly virtually and allows subscribers to connect and share experiences on care homes topics. It's a great opportunity to build relationships with peers. The link to join is: https://www.prescqipp.info/community-resources/virtual-professional-groups/care-homes/

Review

Re-audit is useful to ensure changes have been implemented and standards of practice have improved to the required level, compared with the baseline.

Periodic refresher education and training sessions and re-assessment of competency can also help to ensure that certain targets are being met and guidance is being implemented, in order to maintain a high standard of safety and care.

Summary

Having a system in place for keeping abreast of NICE and SIGN guidance that has been published is important for the care home sector to ensure staff are keeping up-to-date with and implementing information and key standards that are relevant to their role. This will help to ensure the same high standard of care is delivered across the board and that care is delivered using an evidence-based approach.

Additional resources

- Easy access to information from NICE on social care topics. https://www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quick-guides

- NICE. Factsheet 5: Helping to put NICE recommendations into practice (implementation). A guide for patients and carers. March 2013. https://www.nice.org.uk/media/default/About/NICE-Communities/Public-involvement/Developing-NICE-guidance/Factsheet-5-contribute-to-developing-clinical-guidelines.pdf

- Additional support with implementing some of the specific guidance listed in this document can be found via the PrescQIPP website. https://www.prescqipp.info/

- NHS England. The Framework for Enhanced Health in Care Homes. Version 2. March 2020. https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/the-framework-for-enhanced-health-in-care-homes-v2-0.pdf

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- Your local Primary Care Network (PCN) may be able to provide support with the implementation of relevant guidance.
- SIGN 50. A guideline developer's handbook. Published 2008, revised edition published 2019. https://www.sign.ac.uk/media/1050/sign50_2019.pdf (Provides an overview of strategies for implementing clinical guidelines.)

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Additional PrescQIPP resources

📄 Briefing	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-305-implementing-nice-and-sign-guidelines-in-care-homes/
🔧 Implementation tools	

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