

5 Good Communication Standards for our Services

Following the Winterbourne View Review, the Department of Health developed a concordat. The concordat outlined a programme of action that included the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists producing good practice standards on communication.

The 5 Good Communication standards were developed to support service to meet the communication needs of people with learning disabilities. These standards now set out best practice and so our commissioners have included them in the Quality Schedule for 2015-16. We have been asked to:

1. Adapt the standards for our community teams
2. Develop and deliver training in relation to the standards

In brief, the standards are:

Standard 1

There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals

Everyone understands and values an individual's speech, language and communication needs. Individuals are supported and involved, together with the people who know them best, to develop a rich description of the best ways to interact together. This description is agreed, active, regularly updated and readily available. This description may be referred to as a communication passport, guideline or profile. It includes the best ways of supporting understanding and expression, promoting interaction and involvement and describes 'how to be with someone'.

Standard 2

Services demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with their decisions about their care and their services

Service providers recognise that people understand and express themselves in different ways. For individuals this means getting information and expressing themselves in ways that meet their needs. Inclusive communication is an approach that seeks to 'create a supportive and effective communication environment, using every available means of communication to understand and be understood'. For services to demonstrate inclusion and involvement innovative and creative solutions to understanding the views of individuals are often required.

Standard 3

Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual

Staff recognise communication difficulties. They understand that they need to change their communication style to support the service user, and have the knowledge and skills to adapt their communication levels, styles and methods. Staff are aware of factors that impact on communication, especially hearing, sight and sensory integration. Staff know that how they are, what they think and how they say things matters. Staff understand how good communication underpins informed consent and capacity.

Standard 4

Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate

An understanding, welcoming and socially-rich environment is fundamental to relationships for all individuals, and particularly people with communication needs. Relationships are central to wellbeing. Getting the communication environment right contributes to enabling people to live valued and meaningful lives. It is the quality of interaction that contributes to overall emotional and mental wellbeing; providing a sense of belonging, involvement and inclusion. Interaction may not necessarily involve speech. Interaction is a way of 'being' with another person, making meaningful contact with those who are hard to reach or easy to ignore.

Standard 5

Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to health and wellbeing

People with learning disabilities face avoidable health inequalities. Limited communication and health literacy reduces capacity to convey health needs effectively. It is essential to consider communication needs in order to support individuals with their health. Arriving at a diagnosis can prove difficult if a person cannot describe signs and symptoms easily, or their behaviour is misunderstood and misconstrued. Staff need to be aware of how individuals communicate about their health and how they show that they are in pain. This includes considering ill health as a cause for changes in behaviour. Knowing how much a person can understand is also essential in making a decision about their capacity to have a health treatment.