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Guidelines on how to write a practice profile

Improving self-management for patients with long-term conditions

NS531 Davies NJ (2010) Improving self-management for patients with long-term conditions. *Nursing Standard*. 24, 25, 49-56. Date of acceptance: August 4 2009.

Summary

An increasing number of people are living with long-term conditions. These conditions cannot be cured, but can be managed through education, health promotion, medication, therapy and self-management. Self-management involves people taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, as well as learning to manage any long-term illnesses. Nurses play a pivotal role in providing advice, guidance, education and support to people living with long-term conditions. Self-management is important as it not only benefits the patient, but also provides wider opportunities for community and specialist nurses to use and develop their clinical and interpersonal skills.

Author

Nicola J Davies, PhD researcher, Cranfield University, Bedfordshire, and self-management evaluation coordinator, Macmillan Cancer Support. Email: n.davies.s06@cranfield.ac.uk

Keywords

Education, long-term illnesses, self-management, quality of life

These keywords are based on subject headings from the British Nursing Index. This article has been subject to double-blind review. For author and research article guidelines visit the *Nursing Standard* home page at www.nursing-standard.co.uk. For related articles visit our online archive and search using the keywords.

Aims and intended learning outcomes

This article aims to explore some of the nursing implications associated with the rapid increase in the number of people living with long-term conditions, as well as addressing the nurse's role in supporting patients to self-manage their conditions. After reading this article and completing the time out activities you should be able to:

- ▶ Understand the personal and economic burden of long-term conditions.
- ▶ Recognise the benefits of self-management in enhancing the patient's quality of life.
- ▶ Identify your role in supporting patients in self-management.
- ▶ Implement strategies that will support government initiatives aimed at enhancing self-management skills.

Introduction

The British Medical Association (BMA) says that people with a long-term condition should 'own and control their condition' rather than have the condition dictate how they lead their lives (BMA 2007). In England, an estimated 15.4 million people have a long-term condition (Department of Health (DH) 2009a). Long-term conditions may include diabetes, asthma, arthritis, hypertension, some respiratory conditions and some mental health problems, such as depression and schizophrenia. It is estimated that 85% of deaths in the UK are from long-term chronic diseases, with 36% of all deaths resulting from cardiovascular disease and 7% from chronic respiratory disease (European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2008).

The personal and economic burden of long-term conditions is exacerbated by additional health and lifestyle factors. People with two or more long-term conditions are more likely to be obese, eat less healthily and smoke than people with one or none of these conditions (Maskell 2007, Scottish Government 2007). Such co-morbidities affect individuals' quality of life, and lead to huge cost to the NHS. Furthermore,