



Clear Conversations: Improving Verbal Health Literacy in Derbyshire

Background

Health literacy is how easy or difficult it is for people to understand health information. It matters because everyone should be able to get good healthcare. Healthcare workers need good communication skills. This is so people can understand the information they are given and feel able to look after their own health.

This project looked at whether a training session for healthcare workers could:

- Improve healthcare workers communication skills.
- Improve people's health and well-being outcomes.

The Training

A Health Literacy Officer ran a two-hour face-to-face training session. It was interactive and focused on four communication methods:

- **Teach-Back:** Asking people to explain things back in their own words.
- **Chunk and Check:** Giving small bits of information and checking understanding.
- **Simple language:** Using easy-to-understand words.
- **Open questions:** Encouraging questions rather than 'yes' or 'no' answers.

The Health Literacy Officer then gave support to staff to help them use the new skills in daily practice.

Who Took Part?

In total, 11 healthcare workers and 83 service users took part:

- Five physiotherapists running the Derbyshire Community Health Services Pulmonary Rehabilitation Programme. (For people with breathing problems).
- Forty-nine people attending this programme run by the trained physiotherapists.
- Six of the twelve health improvement advisors from the Live Life Better Derbyshire Weight Management Programme. (For people who want to lose weight).
- Thirty-four people attending the Weight Management Programme run by trained and untrained advisors.

What Research Did We Do?

We used six research methods.

To understand if healthcare workers found the training helpful:

- They completed a survey before and after the training.
- We ran a focus group with the physiotherapists and health improvement advisors.

To see how the healthcare workers used the four communication methods:



- We watched them delivering their programmes before and after they were trained

To understand if the training affected service users' understanding and health outcomes:

- They completed a survey measuring changes in their health literacy.
- We looked at changes in health and well-being outcomes.
- We looked at service outcomes such as attendance rates.

What Did We Find Out?

Healthcare workers

- They found the training enjoyable and useful. But they wanted more time to practise using examples from their own work.
- They changed the way they spoke to service users, using Chunk and Check and Open Questions more often.
- They found Teach-Back hard to use in group sessions, but used it in one-to-one appointments.
- Support from the Health Literacy Officer was helpful but hard to fit into busy workdays.
- The training worked best when they could change how they presented the programme information.

Service Users and Services

- People's health literacy and health and well-being improved after attending the programmes. This was the same for programmes run by trained and untrained staff.
- Not enough service users took part. So, we do not know if the training made a difference to health literacy or health outcomes.
- Attendance and completion rates for both programmes did not change.

What Do We Recommend?

- Make small changes to improve the training. Including more time to practise and adapting it for different job roles.
- Provide ongoing support to help staff use the skills. Using different ways to support busy teams.
- Offer the training to all new staff and in their professional development programmes.
- Do more research with more people. To reassess the improved training and see if it improves people's health literacy and health and well-being outcomes.