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TOWARDS A NATIONAL STANDARD ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT IN CONTINUING CARE HOMES: USE OF THE MDS/RAI

PSSRU

Background Information

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In the UK the centrality of assessment in the care of vulnerable older people was made explicit as one of the key objectives for service delivery in the 1989 White Paper *Caring for People* (Cm 849, 1989) and is repeated in the National Service Framework for Older People (DoH, 2001a). The NHS Plan (Cm 4818-I, 2000) and the National Service Framework for Older People identify the need for a Single Assessment Process with detailed specification of assessment domains. The National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People (DoH, 2001b) specifies required need areas for a comprehensive assessment of residents and that a service user plan of care should be drawn up based upon this comprehensive assessment.

Assessment is linked to four key areas in the development of effective care policies and practices: firstly, determination of eligibility for services; secondly, the identification of care needs; thirdly, the decision whether or not to enter care homes; and finally, regular review or re-assessment. Hence, it is possible to see assessment as associated not just with the initial judgement at the point of entry to care homes or the provision of levels or types of care, but also more broadly at other levels in the care process such as eligibility for funding, levels of funding and re-imburement, and review and quality assurance within homes (Challis et al., 1996).

In the late 1980s, following concern about a series of scandals relating to quality of care which had arisen in the long-term care industry, the US Government Health Care Finance Administration contracted with a consortium of professionals for a system which would record individual need, provide reliable information for quality and link needs to costs. The result was the Minimum Data Set/Resident Assessment Instrument (MDS/RAI).

The MDS/RAI

The MDS/RAI consists of the Minimum Data Set, a structured assessment tool (Box 1) covering the range of domains of need appropriate for assessing the needs of vulnerable older people in care homes, and 18 Resident Assessment Protocols (RAPs) (Box 2). The latter are triggered by the assessment tool and guide the assessor through areas of potential need to identify whether further action is required in the care plan. It is completed as an admission assessment to provide baseline data and periodically reviewed.

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The **Personal Social Services Research Unit** undertakes social and health care research, focusing particularly on policy research and analysis of equity and efficiency in community care and long term care and related areas, including services for elderly people, people with mental health problems and children in care. The Unit's work is funded mainly by the Department of Health.

The PSSRU Bulletin and publication lists are available free of charge from the PSSRU librarian in Canterbury (01227 827773) and on the Internet the Unit Web site can be found at <http://www.pssru.ac.uk> The PSSRU was established at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1974 and from 1996 has operated from three sites:

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Box 1: The MDS/RAI Assessment Domains

Identification and background information	Health conditions
Cognitive patterns	Oral/nutritional status
Communication/hearing patterns	Oral/dental status
Vision patterns	Skin condition
Mood and behaviour patterns	Activity pursuit patterns
Psychosocial well-being	Medications
Mobility and activities of daily living	Special treatments and procedures
Continence in last 14 days	Discharge potential/overall status
Disease diagnoses	Assessment information

Box 2: The MDS/RAI Resident Assessment Protocols (RAPs)

Acute confusional state	Activities
Cognitive loss/dementia	Falls
Visual function	Nutritional status
Communication	Feeding tubes
ADL function/rehabilitation potential	Dehydration/fluid maintenance
Urinary incontinence & indwelling catheter	Dental care
Psychosocial well-being	Pressure sores
Mood state	Psychotropic drug use
Behavioural symptoms	Physical restraints

Using the MDS/RAI in the UK

A pilot study of the assessment tool in the UK found that 78% of staff reported that they had learned new information about the resident. In general it was seen as a good comprehensive assessment document, which had the potential to indicate changes in residents' needs through time. It also improved staff perceptions about the need for rehabilitation and other possible interventions to improve care (Challis et al., 1999).

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned the PSSRU to produce a UK version of the MDS manual for use in care homes. This has now been published: UK Long Term Care Resident Assessment Instrument User's Manual, MDS/RAI UK by D Challis, K Stewart, D Sturdy and A Worden, interRAI UK, York, 2000. (Available from York Publishing Services Limited, 64 Hallfield Road, York YO31 7ZQ, ISBN 0-9538733-0-7 or to order online from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Web Page: www.jrf.org.uk)

The MDS is cited on the Department of Health website as one of two assessment approaches recommended for use in care homes. Future research is planned to evaluate the use of the MDS in care homes in the UK.

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