

ACUTE LIAISON NURSE WORKSHOP



Project supported by the PHA

Roving Reporters Shelley and Chris from TILII Muckamore Patients Council & Philip Foster from Lisburn TILII attended the workshop to find out about the exciting prospect of Acute Liaison Nurse coming to Northern Ireland.

We were asked to do a Roving Report on the Acute Liaison Nurse Workshop and were excited to be involved. We decided to do some research, to find out what an Acute Liaison Nurse was. Acute Liaison Nurses exist to promote access to hospital services for people with a learning disability by directly supporting people, developing hospital and community systems, influencing strategies and policies and educating hospital staff. They work with any adult and child with a learning disability who requires additional support to access hospital services. We were very keen to do this story to highlight how they help people like us. We got our glad rags on and all our equipment ready and arrived at the Dunsilly Hotel ready to do our work. The first person we interviewed was Owen Barr from Ulster University.

Owen said "We have learnt a lot today about how important Acute Liaison Nurses are and how much they can help when someone with a learning disability goes into hospital. They help the other nurses in the hospital better meet the needs of the person with a learning disability by providing them with information on different types of communication. They also really help people with a learning disability to make choices during their stay in hospital, for example if they are worried about treatment and making sure they understand all the options. I think if there were Acute Liaison Nurses in all hospitals in Northern Ireland it would make the hospital experience a lot easier for people with a learning disability. When they go into hospital there would be somebody there who knows about specific support services for people with a learning disability."

We were very much in demand and as soon as Owen left we had our next interviewee, Jenny McMahon, Clinical Co-ordinator in the Surgical Wards of the South Eastern Trust. Jenny told us "Today has been great and I have learnt just how

important this job is. I work in an acute hospital and it is really important to have someone with the expertise and the knowledge who can guide and support the patient, the family and nursing staff, including the multi professional teams. People need to prepare for hospital if they are having planned surgery, so to have someone dedicated in a nursing role to gather information about the person, their condition and explore how we can make their experience a positive one, at times of worry is very important. I am not a learning disability nurse but I have become an Acute Liaison Nurse and I really enjoy it.”

Iolo Eilian is a Commissioner for the Health & Social Care Board. Iolo said “Initially I thought that the Acute Liaison Nurse supported a person who came through the Emergency Department. I didn’t realise that it’s more important for those people who have planned to go into hospital, supporting them in that journey. I think that we would definitely benefit from having more of these specific nursing roles and from what I hear this morning, it’s happening in England, Scotland and Wales so I think it should happen in Northern Ireland as well.”

We had chance to have a quick break and a cup of tea with a yummy scone to get our energy back for the next victim! Rosemary Haven is a Sister in Antrim Area Hospital Emergency Department and also works through the Bank of the Northern Trust in the Community Learning Disability Team. “I’ve learned a lot this morning” she said. “I think it’s a wonderful opportunity within the acute setting to try and help clients with a learning disability through the acute setting. It’s very exciting and I hope it will be of help having a face that the client will recognise – it will be a friendly face. Not only someone they or their family members can talk to, but someone that can also go to other medical staff to speak to them and hopefully make the outcomes better for the person with a learning disability. I think it’s a very exciting time and I hope that the senior managers do go ahead and develop this role.”

Next up was Sandra Burns, Lead Nurse in the Southern Trust. “I think it’s excellent. It’s a great opportunity to hear what’s going on in the whole of the UK, and what we can maybe bring forward in Northern Ireland. I’ve learnt of the very big need for this Liaison Nurse role. I work in an acute hospital and for someone to come in and help the journey of a patient with difficulty and with learning disabilities is very important.”

We then went into the conference to take some pictures of all the people who were taking part in the workshop. The atmosphere was very positive and everyone was very excited about the prospect of Acute Liaison Nurses coming to Northern Ireland. There’s no rest for Roving Reporters so we caught up with Peter Griffin next. Peter is Professional Lead for Learning Disability Nursing at Queens University Belfast. Peter said “It was very interesting, with some really good speakers and lots of discussion. I have learnt that there’s a great enthusiasm within the room to see this development of Liaison Nurses in Northern Ireland.”

“It’s very interesting. I think it’s long overdue because we’re behind the rest of the United Kingdom.” said Patrick Convery, Head of Programmes for Mental Health & Learning Disability. “I work for RQIA and it was a recommendation seven years ago so I’m delighted to see today people asking how far have we progressed with this. Today has been great in generating a wee bit of interest. The right people are in the room because the people we’re looking at are from acute hospitals who would like to drive this forward. I’d really welcome it, it’s long overdue.”

We were waiting for our next interviewee and a couple of people came out of the conference. We got feedback from Susan Maxwell, a Senior Nurse in the Learning Disability team in Magherafelt; and Maurice Devine, the Assistant Head of Clinical Education Centre for Nurses, Midwives and Allied Health Professionals.

“What have I learned from today? I’ve learnt about the role of the Learning Disability Nurse within adult hospitals and what they can do for people with learning disability.” said Susan. Maurice said “I think Acute Liaison Nurses are a very

good idea and are needed to improve how we provide care for people with a learning disability who use our acute hospitals.”

We had a couple of minutes to prepare our questions for the conference host and we decided to get cosy by moving to sit around the roaring fireplace. Briege Quinn is the Nurse Consultant for Mental Health and Learning Disability at the Public Health Agency and she said about how nice and cosy it looked before taking a seat in one of the comfortable armchairs. “I’ve learnt a lot this morning and it’s been an extremely informative event. There has been a lot of really good information about experiences in Scotland and experiences in Cambridge, England. The theme that everybody talks about is the importance of communication. Really good communication is very important. This helps to collaborate well with other service providers, to coordinate a person’s journey through a general hospital setting which can be very confusing for a lot of people. If we look at how people in England and Scotland have benefited, they are telling us that the experience for the service user is so much better and the actual health outcomes are better which was a bit of a surprise. Actually, people do better in hospital when they have a Learning Disability Liaison Nurse guiding them through the process and that can also benefit their families as well. I think anything that helps improve the safety, the quality and the experience for service users - wherever they are from and whatever their condition – is very important to consider here in Northern Ireland. The Learning Disability Liaison Nurse is a missing piece that we do not have in Northern Ireland so I do think it’s important that we give it serious consideration.”

TILII Tips

- Use your voice to speak out and get Acute Liaison Nurses in our hospitals
- Make sure your families know about Acute Liaison Nurses so they can get the help and support they need when their loved ones are going into hospital
- Once they’re available, make sure that you remember to have an Acute Liaison Nurse when you are going into hospital to make sure all of your individual needs are met

We hope you have enjoyed our Roving Report, and it helps to raise awareness and get Acute Liaison Nurses in Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

