Implementing a strategy for identifying and managing malnutrition appropriately in care homes

Background

Malnutrition is estimated to cost £13 billion a year\(^1\). Consequences if left untreated include; mortality, morbidity and impaired physical health\(^2\). In the UK 41% of individuals in care homes are at risk of malnutrition\(^3\). The aim of this project was to implement a strategy which incorporated evidence based guidance\(^4\) to identify malnutrition risk using the ‘Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool’ (‘MUST’) and management actions according to risk in care homes to determine if positive outcomes could be generated.

Methods

A dedicated nurse undertook a baseline audit in 5 care homes (n=132) over 3 months. Data was collected on nutritional measures and healthcare use. ‘MUST’ was then implemented in each care home by the nurse in conjunction with the care home medicines support team. This involved monthly ‘MUST’ screening for all residents and initiation and review of nutritional management plans, including use of oral nutritional supplements for residents at high risk of malnutrition. A re-audit was completed over 3 months and results compared to baseline. Data was analysed using McNemar and Fisher’s exact statistical tests. Healthcare use costs were assessed using unit and prescribing costs\(^5,6\).

Results

Significant improvements were made in the number of individuals screened monthly (36 vs. 98% p<0.001), documentation of height (66 vs. 100% p<0.001), monthly weights (42 vs. 98% p<0.001) and use of appropriate nutrition care plans (56 vs. 98% p<0.001).

Healthcare use decreased with a significant reduction in healthcare professional (e.g. district nurse) contacts (26% reduction p<0.001), fewer hospital admissions (37% reduction p<0.082) and infections requiring antibiotics (28% reduction p<0.096).

The associated reduction in healthcare costs (-£224.22 per resident) more than offset the costs to screen, manage, and review residents (+£36.31 per resident) demonstrating estimated savings of -£187.91 per resident for 3 months (-£751.64 annually).

Conclusion

This project demonstrated that screening and appropriate management of malnutrition can be improved by implementing a nurse led strategy in care homes. The costs to screen and manage malnutrition were more than offset by the reduction in healthcare costs.

References

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