

Using a peer education approach to improve public awareness of end of life issues with older people

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Background

Public awareness and education initiatives in end of life care are being promoted in England within national strategies around end of life care. Whilst recent activity has been undertaken nationally to survey public attitudes regarding dying and death, local initiatives are also being undertaken engaging with different sectors of the population in new and creative ways. Building upon previous projects undertaken in England¹, a group of older adults and researcher worked together to develop further resources and skills within one locality, using the principles of peer education. In this context peer education refers to an approach to learning that is based upon sharing experiences and learning amongst people who share something in common²; in this project: age and an interest in planning for the future.

The aims of this project were:

- To design a personal portfolio for individuals to record individually tailored end of life resources and information
- To undertake end of life workshops for older members of the general public and their advocates.

Methods

A participatory research approach was used in this project. This involved a group of older adults, an educational facilitator and an academic researcher working together to develop and deliver the project. We wanted to develop practical responses to the challenges of planning ahead for future aging and end of life situations. In order to do this we undertook two areas of activity:

1. Development of a personal end of life information and resources portfolio

A series of monthly meetings were held (n=8) in which the end of life issues faced by group members were examined and appropriate sources of information and resources to address these issues identified. Notes were made of the processes undertaken. A personal portfolio template within which individuals could record their information and resources pertinent to their issues was developed.



Lancaster Peer Education group who undertook this project comprised eight older adults and one academic researcher from Lancashire. We have a range of professional backgrounds in health and social care. We also have varied personal experiences of living with different illnesses and caring for family and friends as they age and towards the end of life. We have undertaken training about peer education and end of life issues.

2. Development of a community workshop

Two community workshops were held to explore public awareness around end of life issues and, identify further needs for information. These were attended by 22 older adults and 14 health and social care professionals. Within each workshop three aspects were addressed: (1) identifying important issues to address when thinking about future care as an older adult; (2) how an individual can begin the planning process; and (3) how people can be enabled to start to talk about these issues with other people close to them. Within the workshop the portfolio was shared and feedback sought from participants. It was positively evaluated for its clarity and comprehensiveness.

Portfolio Contents

The portfolio comprises the following sections:

- Introduction to the Portfolio
- Who am I?
- Personal details
- Life contacts
- Health information
- Important documents
- How I want to be cared for now and in the future
- Anticipating future changes
- After I die

Plus:

Background
Further Information
Resources

Conclusions

The portfolio has been positively evaluated by people who have seen it. There is a need to do further work to present it in a creative and dynamic way that will encourage older people to think about end of life issues and future planning. Different formats (electronic and paper) are needed to make the portfolio accessible to a wide range of older people. The workshops have identified further information needs amongst older people which has led to further community education events.

References

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2. Shiner M 1999 Defining peer education. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22: 555-566

