

# A staff training intervention to improve communication between people living with dementia and health-care professionals in hospital: the VOICE mixed-methods development and evaluation study

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## Plain English summary

### **The VOICE mixed-methods study**

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## Plain English summary

People with dementia are frequently admitted to general hospitals, and often have problems communicating. Much of health care is delivered through talk. Communication problems can make the delivery of care difficult.

We video-recorded 41 encounters between 26 professionals and 26 people living with dementia, and analysed them to understand when problems arose and how skilled practitioners overcame them. We designed a 2-day communication skills training course, which we ran as a pilot, and then on six further occasions, including 45 staff from two hospitals. The course used a variety of teaching methods, including simulation (actors playing the part of patients). We evaluated the course.

Particular problems were found during requests (patients often refused) and the 'closing' at the end of the encounter. Agreement was more likely when requests were direct and made with a high degree of authority and, when possible, difficulties associated with the task were minimised. Closings worked better when the staff member announced the end of the task, they made a specific arrangement, their body language matched what they were saying, and they used 'closing idioms' (common sayings such as 'all done and dusted'). The course ran successfully and was rated highly by participants. After the course, we measured improvements in confidence, knowledge and communication behaviours. Participants reported that they found the methods useful in practice and were still using them 1 month after the course finished. They particularly valued the simulation, the use of real life video-clips and learning in a mixed group of professionals.

We identified areas of particular communication difficulty for health-care professionals and people living with dementia, and ways in which skilled practitioners overcame them. We can improve the communication skills of (even experienced) health-care staff, and simulation is a valuable method by which to achieve this.



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