

NutritionDay in Long Term Care in the Province of Styria/Austria – Multi-stakeholder approach

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Background of initiative

In the province of Styria/Austria, due to local legal regulations, only people with multi-morbidity and coexisting handicaps in the activities of daily living are accepted for admission to long term care facilities. As a consequence, the population currently living in local nursing homes has become more and more vulnerable. In this specific population group nutritional problems are widespread. Nevertheless, awareness of the impact of nutrition on individual outcome and wellbeing of nursing home residents is still low. Furthermore, documentation and nursing concepts for nutritional care used within long term care vary significantly, at least in the province of Styria/Austria.

Presently, there are 198 long term care institutions within Styria. Half of those are public, the other 50% are directed on private basis. At the time the project was developed, it was estimated that the institutions hosted approximately 12.000 residents (exact data missing due to lack of centralized data management within the authorities). Data about nutritional behavior and nutritional status of nursing home residents are scarce within our region.

It was therefore of interest

1. to start an initiative collecting data about nutritional status of nursing home residents,
2. to evaluate structural background and consecutive clinical course,
3. to translate results to local policy makers in charge of health and social care as well as executive directors of nursing homes.

Activity

The Styrian initiative was performed within the frame of the nutritionDay project. The project is based on the assumption that in order to effectively implement changes within the structures of residential care, it is necessary to know the relevant facts and to use them to obtain support from the facility. Therefore, "nutritionDay in Nursing Homes" seemed to be a valuable tool to address current nutritional problems of nursing home residents in Styria.

A multistakeholder partnership was raised between

- Austrian Association for Clinical Nutrition (AKE) and nutritionDay
- Medical University of Vienna/Austria (academic)
- University of Erlangen/Germany (academic)
- local Styrian partners
 - Medical University Graz (academic)
 - Steirische Patientenwaltschaft (administration and policy)
 - Nursing Homes
 - Nursing academies – facilitating nutritionDay in the Nursing Home, data entry
 - University for Applied Science – facilitating nutritionDay in the nursing home, data entry
 - Provincial government responsible for health and social care issues

The multi-stakeholder approach

Additionally to the multi-factorial approach of nutritionDay – from increasing awareness to stimulating changes on structural and political level – the strength of the Styrian initiative was to tackle current nutritional problems by initiating a multi-stakeholder partnership between governmental bodies, health care professionals and scientific experts in the field of clinical nutrition.

The multi-stakeholder approach allows

- training of nursing home staff about malnutrition in older persons (September 2012), including discussion rounds to allow the staff to express their perspective and concerns with regard to diagnosis and treatment of malnutrition, but also their view on the structural factors. All participants received handouts and folders containing relevant information about the initiative and its background and the procedure of data collection and data entry. Participation: n = 226 people working in nursing homes
- facilitating nutritionDay by supporting the nursing home staff and entering the data (78 students). Training of nursing and dietetic students, in regard to the topic but also in performing a clinical trial.
- active involvement of a political body. The member of the provincial government responsible for health and social care issues took the political leadership. This political body expressed their political commitment, informed the nursing homes about the project, and organized the training and discussion rounds of nursing home staff members together with the Medical University of Graz. Furthermore, information about the provincial initiative was distributed within the local newspapers. All processes were guided and organised by the Medical University of Graz in cooperation with the Steirische Patientenombudschaft.

Implementation

On 8th November 2012, 61 Styrian institutions participated in nutritionDay in Nursing Homes with 104 units. Finally, 3.106 residents were screened for nutritional status on that day. No adverse events or complaints were documented or noticed.

Resources utilized

Resources utilized mainly focused on personnel. 4 people in Graz organized the whole process within a period of 7 months from set-up of the initiative. 78 students and 226 staff members of local nursing homes were trained for the initiative. Besides the Erlangen/Nürnberg team (3 people), 13 people joined the process of developing and adapting the report for participating nursing homes. Two people within the nutritionDay office prepared the separate coding for the region of Styria. There was no additional financial support for the whole project. Especially the cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences and the local Styrian nursing schools – inviting students for data input in the nursing homes on the 8th November 2012 – proved to be very effective.

Achievements of multi-stakeholder approach

During the whole process and due to various qualitative discussions with people working in nursing homes, it became clear that all the return/feedback information needed to be adapted to local needs as well as to the professional needs of nurses. Therefore, the feedback report was completely revised from the Erlangen-Nürnberg team, and a first draft was sent to a group of 5 specialists in the field of long term care, which was established meanwhile, as well as 8 local participants. In a two-step Delphi Survey, this group gave feedback, and the nursing home report was adapted and further improved accordingly. These reports were sent out to all participants at the end of May 2013. Feedback from the institutions was throughout positive as could also be seen by the complete coverage of the second survey within nutritionDay which was to be sent by the end of May 2013.

Key learnings from the initiative

- building networks between all persons/institutions involved is of utmost importance
- importance of continuous personal communication within nutrition initiatives
- A comprehensive approach and joined forces are key of success
- importance of inclusion of health care professionals in- and outside the nutritional field

What makes the initiative innovative?

The multi-stakeholder approach makes the Styrian initiative innovative as it reaches out to political decision makers on the one hand and to health care professionals, who are working in the field, on the other. With this two-dimensional approach a top down and bottom-up approach could be pursued simultaneously which led to changes on structural and political level as well as increased awareness in the field and involvement of health care professionals.

Furthermore, through the continuous feedback-loop of the Styrian initiative to the nutritionDay team the nutritionDay reports for nursing homes were revised to meet the needs of nutritional and non-nutritional health care professionals in- and outside the Austrian border. This step can be seen as a major breakthrough since it is of utmost importance to facilitate the translation of theoretical input into implementing changes also for non-nutritional health care professionals in order to overcome barriers between professions and to reinforce the joint fight against malnutrition.

Change of legislation

The relationship between nursing homes, the Patients' Office and the Medical University has changed to an open and collaborative community. As a consequence, future nutritional projects will be defined and planned together. First preliminary data have been presented to the local government already. This will lead to a change within the legislation. Stakeholders are currently altering the legal basis for nursing homes in Styria. In the new proposal, nutritional care will be incorporated according to the latest recommendations adapted by the ministry of health in Austria as well as the German guidelines on clinical nutrition in geriatrics (DGEM-guidelines 2013)

Change of quality assurance

- Quality of nutritional care will be checked in all nursing homes on regular basis by legal officers.
- As a next step, checklists will be adapted according to the new recommendations. The data obtained will be recorded and investigated on scientific basis by the Medical University of Graz. The University will also provide educational modules granted within the European Educational Framework for further education.

The model developed through that process within Styria will be of interest not only nationally but also internationally or on a European level respectively. All steps taken may be repeated using a uniform process management model and may therefore be implemented in different public systems.

The importance of bringing people together

Our initiative has, for the first time in literature, built up such a holistic multi-stakeholder approach.

In this initiative the importance of bringing different health care professions together to start the joint fight against malnutrition effectively was demonstrated.

The Styrian initiative is an outstanding example of co-operation, integration and joining forces resulting in a win-win situation for all parties independent of professional background. With this initiative the importance of this year's theme of the congress "Tearing down barriers – the importance of bringing people together" in order to reach changes in nutritional care and to encourage the fight against malnutrition was outstandingly demonstrated and successfully implemented.

National Society endorsing submission:

Austrian Society for Clinical Nutrition (AKE)

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Title of Project:

nutritionDay in Long Term Care in the Province of Styria/Austria

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