

Introduction of an Excel 'Time Tool' to monitor time needed by staff to support people and to prompt reflection about support techniques

An Excel 'Time Tool' to monitor time requirements for individuals' and whole-group support needs was developed by the manager of a local authority (LA) day centre for people with dementia.

The manager of a local authority day centre for people with dementia, [Esther Wiskerke](#), developed a spreadsheet to monitor the frequency of certain occurrences (e.g. individual behavioural, mobility or personal care related support needs), and the staff time needed to support people at these times. The Time Tool aimed to help monitor a person's changing needs for support and overall group needs. It was also useful for sharing expertise between staff and for self-audit. The tool was intended as a positive monitoring exercise - to support staff, improve personalised support and support care plan reviews.

Rough timings were entered into the tool retrospectively in whole group staff meetings. Each client was discussed in turn. How long was spent supporting them (to do different things)? Was the day centre still appropriate for them? The staff team then reflected on support timing differences and learnt from each other how best and most efficiently to support clients in certain situations. For example: if one staff member said it took them five minutes to support a certain person to use the toilet, and another commented that it took them 20 minutes, discussion would follow about what method each had used. Care plans were sometimes amended accordingly.

Background

Although day centre clients are part of a group, they can expect a certain level of individual input from staff during their day at the centre. Some people will need exclusive individual support with some tasks to ensure that they are not at risk of harming themselves or others. The Time Tool addresses this.

The following were measured: time taken by certain 'events', the number of times these would happen (frequency), staff time taken in intervening (minutes) and numbers of staff needed to intervene. These would lead to a number and time that could be logged to review progress. Support needs were divided into categories, such as mobility and nutrition. Frequency and length of staff intervention time for certain 'events' were noted based on clients' behaviours and needs, and the number of intervention minutes totalled. This enabled progress monitoring /intervention needed at individual level.

Examples:

Behaviour: If, in the beginning, before a client had settled in, they needed help to feel calm, measures of this would be recorded on the behaviour category. For instance, 10 times, 2 and a half minutes each time, two staff (25 minutes per staff member, 50 minutes in total). Over time, once they had settled in, this might reduce significantly.

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Personal care: Somebody not needing help to use the toilet would have no measure recorded on the tool. With time, they might need to be signposted to the toilets or need prompting or help with handwashing. Later, they may need to be discouraged from putting inappropriate things into the toilet. Eventually, full personal care assistance may be necessary (e.g. incontinence pad changes).

Mobility: A client may ask where they need to go and be able to go there without assistance. If they are at risk of falls, or require supervision or assistance to move around, then these would be examples of increased staff intervention.

Nutrition: If a client can eat and drink independently, even with modified diet or equipment such as a non-spill cup, they would not have any measures recorded on the Tool. If clients need prompting to drink enough, assistance with eating, or supervision to ensure they do not take food from others, then time measurements reflecting the need to provide one to one support would be included in the Tool.

Outcomes of using the Time Tool

- **Benefits for clients:** Better understanding of changing needs and the time and methods necessary to support them. Staff sharing tips may lead to improved personalised support. Regular reviews of needs, sometimes leading to care plan changes, would ensure their needs are recognised, met and accounted for. More focus on actual practical support time needed means that clients would not be excluded from the service on specific individual criteria, such as whether they are able to weight-bear.
- **Benefits for relatives:** Provides non-judgemental evidence supporting decisions about whether the service continues to be appropriate for individual clients. Providing non-emotive descriptions of time intensity required to support their relative can be less painful for carers to hear than details of 'inappropriate' behaviours (e.g. undressing, faeces-smearing). It may be helpful for carers to be given clear explanations of Time Tool evidence, and how it was arrived at. This could help illustrate how their family member has been treated as an individual and not compared with other clients and may alleviate any concerns they may have.
- **Benefits for staff:** Staff felt that identifying specific individual support challenges helped them feel validated because the challenges they faced on a daily basis were evidenced. The tool was also useful for service self-audit – e.g. team meetings identified how much time staff spent supporting people with the same tasks – shared tips etc. Reflective discussions at meetings were reportedly experienced as refreshing.
- **Benefits for manager/service:** Gaining clarity on the complex behavioural and psychological symptoms as clients' dementia progresses and the effect this has on pressure felt by staff and on staffing levels. Additional way to review care plans and monitor clients' needs.

Notes on use of the Time Tool

The Time Tool is intended to be used at intervals, to monitor a person's support needs. For example, every month or 6 weeks. Staff groups would then discuss individual support needs and any differences across time.

