

Accountability

A common phrase we hear is that someone should be 'held to account' for an action that has led to adverse consequences, or for actions not taken that lead to something going wrong. The idea applies particularly to health and care services where individuals' lives and wellbeing can be at stake. Service users should expect any care and treatment they receive to be beneficial to them and not to harm them. Care workers therefore are accountable for what they do and omit to do.

What is accountability?

Accountability means being responsible to someone, or for some action, and that you are able to explain what you do. Being accountable therefore involves being prepared to describe and justify (account for) your actions to others so that they can decide whether you have fulfilled what is expected of you. There is also the implication that if you do not fulfil your duties, either you or your employer will be held accountable; you or your employer may be penalised (Checkland *et al*, 2004).

Professionals in health and social care are held accountable for their work by their regulatory bodies. For example, social workers in England are obliged to comply with the General Social Care Council's guidance: they must be 'accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills' (GSCC, 2010). Likewise, nurses are accountable to their professional body, which requires that they are 'personally accountable for actions and omissions' in their professional practice and must always be able to justify their decisions (NMC, 2008).

In addition to professional regulatory bodies, care workers are also accountable to:

- the people they look after and their families and carers, in ensuring care is safe and effective
- their employer, in ensuring they fulfil their duties and justify their decisions

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- their colleagues, in ensuring they act in a responsible way
- themselves, in ensuring they uphold personal standards and maintain and improve their knowledge and skills.

Care workers can demonstrate accountability by:

- keeping records of what they do, including reasons for any omissions
- following guidelines and protocols
- providing safe and high quality care.

Summary

Accountability means being responsible to someone, or for some action, and ensuring that you are able to explain what you do. Care workers are accountable to their professional bodies, their clients, employers and colleagues, as well as themselves. They can demonstrate accountability by keeping records, following guidelines and working safely.

References

- Checkland, K., Marshall, M. and Harrison, S. (2004), 'Re-thinking accountability: Trust versus confidence in medical practice', *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, 13 (2), 130–5
- GSCC (2010), *Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers*, London, General Social Care Council
- NMC (2008), *The Code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives*, London, Nursing and Midwifery Council

Active participation

Increasingly, people who use health and social care services are becoming active participants in their own care. They are no longer the passive recipients of services. Through ensuring active participation, care services and care workers can empower individuals to attain a greater control over their lives.

What is active participation?

Active participation can be defined as recognising an individual's right to make decisions about and participate in the activities and relationships of everyday life as independently as possible. This means that the individual is an active partner in his or her own care and is not placed in a subordinate position to those who are providing care.

This definition supports the rights of individuals and their independence or autonomy. This is in keeping with the government's modernisation agenda for public services, which was enacted through legislation including the NHS Plan (DH, 2000). Modernisation is about involving the people who use services in the way services are delivered, and about focusing on individual users' needs and preferences rather than on what services and workers want to provide.

Upholding the personal autonomy of the individual is an important component of active participation. The Principles of Participation leaflet (GSCC *et al*, 2006) outlines how active participation can enhance individuals' autonomy, ensuring that individuals fully understand the reasons for the activities they participate in, and make informed choices about how they will be involved.

Active participation brings clear benefits for individuals. These can be divided into primary benefits and secondary benefits. Primary benefits include:

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- physical benefits brought about by increased activity
- increased opportunities for social contact and interpersonal relationships
- greater involvement through awareness of opportunities
- fulfilling opportunities for learning and development of important skills, knowledge, education and employment
- enhanced wellbeing, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief.

The following secondary benefits also occur as a result of active participation:

- decreasing likelihood of abuse as individuals engage positively in areas of their lives such as personal care
- decreasing vulnerability to exploitation as individuals gain self-confidence and self-esteem.

Care workers can promote active participation by engaging individuals in their own care and in the way services are organised and delivered. It is important to ask individuals what they want to do and how they want to carry out an activity; to explain alternatives and choices they might have; to raise their awareness of different opportunities; and not to assume an individual cannot do something without good evidence that this is the case.



Summary

Active participation is an approach that empowers individuals in the activities and relationships of everyday life, enabling them to live as independently as possible. The importance for the individual as an active partner in his or her own care or support is that this brings physical, psychological, relational and overall benefits to wellbeing.

References

- DH (2000), *The NHS Plan: A plan for investment, a plan for reform*, London, Department of Health
- Edexcel (2011), *Edexcel Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) for England (QCF)*, Harlow, Pearson Education
- GSCC, CSCI, Sfc and SCIE (2006), *Eight Principles for Involving Service Users and Carers*, General Social Care Council, Commission for Social Care Inspection, Skills for Care and Social Care Institute for Excellence