

2013 Commissioned Research on Dementia Care

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Title of research project: Risk Communication in Dementia Care

Abstract: A major issue in dementia care in Northern Ireland is the high number of people being admitted to long-term residential and nursing home care. One of the main challenges in addressing this issue is a tendency to avoid risk on the part of the professionals and family members, whereas many people with mild to moderate dementia would prefer to remain in their own homes, facing the risks involved. A practice issue underpinning this problem is lack of clear risk communication. Professionals, family members and those with dementia may conceptualise risks in various ways and may use the word 'risk' differently.

This study addresses this issue by (1) identifying concepts of risk used by professionals, family carers and people with mild to moderate dementia; (2) identifying the risk factors that they encounter and address most commonly in dementia care decisions about long term care; and (3) exploring in details how professionals communicate about the likelihood of some 'risks' (undesirable outcomes) using words, numbers and visual methods for presenting probabilities.

As well as addressing a high priority policy and practice issue for health and social care in Northern Ireland, this study will build on the international expertise of the Harding Centre for Risk Literacy and the Centre for Adaptive Behaviour and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin (MPIB) in relation to risk communication. MPIB is world-leading in the study of risk and decision making and a number of studies have been undertaken on risk communication in health care. The project will develop collaboration between the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and the University of Ulster on risk and decision making in health and social care with future benefit for the service and research in Northern Ireland.