

Standardising Sleep Assessment in Adults with Learning Disabilities: Development and Early Implementation of a Structured Sleep Assessment & Management Tool

A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
Intensive Support Team (IST), Greenfields
Learning Disability Services

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1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

To evaluate the quality and consistency of sleep assessments within the Intensive Support Team (IST) and determine whether a structured Sleep Assessment & Management Tool could identify gaps in practice and improve the quality and consistency of assessments.

We hypothesised that routine practice was variable and that a structured approach would support more comprehensive, evidence-informed assessment.

2 BACKGROUND

Sleep disorders are highly prevalent in adults with learning disabilities and contribute to behavioural distress, poorer physical and mental health, reduced quality of life, and increased carer burden.

Before this project, no standardised sleep assessment framework existed within the service, resulting in inconsistent assessment and documentation.

A structured tool was therefore developed to support holistic assessment and clinical decision-making.

3 METHODS

Design: Retrospective Quality Improvement Project.

Sample: Ten patients randomly selected from the IST caseload; clinical records from the preceding six months examined.

Retrospective Checklist: A structured checklist covering six domains was used to evaluate documentation quality.

Sleep Screening

Assessment Components

Use of Structured Tools

Sleep Disorder Differentials

Management

MDT Involvement & Follow-up

Tool Development: Findings informed the development of a practical Sleep Assessment & Management Tool for routine use in adults with learning disabilities.

4 RESULTS

Quality of Assessments (n=10)

Very Poor (30%)

Poor (30%)

Adequate (20%)

Good (20%)

60%
Poor Very Poor

Key Findings

- Sleep was actively asked about in only 20% of assessments: two assessments did not discuss sleep.
- Objective monitoring was rare: sleep diary used in only 1 out of 10 cases.
- Documentation of medication rationale, environmental factors, daytime functioning sleep disorder differentials, GP involvement and specialist referrals was frequently absent or unclear.
- Considerable variation in assessment quality with 60% rated poor or very poor.

The newly developed Sleep Assessment & Management Tool addresses these gaps through a structured, holistic and evidence-informed pathway.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Significant variation in sleep assessment practice was identified.

Assessment was often subjective with minimal use of structured tools.

A comprehensive Sleep Assessment & Management Tool was developed.

Implementation has commenced and one teaching session on structured sleep assessment has been delivered to the multi disciplinary team.

PDSA Cycle 2 will evaluate uptake, documentation quality and clinical impact.

OUR NEW SLEEP ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT TOOL Snapshot of the Tool

Sleep Assessment & Management Tool

ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES BCHC NHS Trust

Patient Name: NHS ID No.:
D.O.B.: Age: Date:
Assessor: Assessment Date:
Reason for assessment: ☐ Initial assessment ☐ Annual review ☐ Follow up ☐ Sleep concern raised

1. SLEEP SCREENING

☐ Difficulty falling asleep

☐ Daytime sleepiness

☐ Night waking

☐ Sleep impacting behaviour functioning

☐ Early morning waking

☐ Any of Y3S complete full assessment below

2. COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT (Domains)

Sleep pattern

Night-time symptoms

Daytime impact

Environment & routine

Physical & mental health factors

Medication review

3. SCREENING TOOLS

☐ Sleep diary

☐ STOP-Bang

☐ Epworth pictorial Epworth

☐ Other

4. CLINICAL IMPRESSION / DIFFERENTIAL

☐ Insomnia

☐ Sleep apnoea

☐ Restless legs noct. sleep

☐ Parasomnia

☐ Sleep epilepsy

☐ Nocturnal epilepsy

☐ Cardiac rhythm disorder

☐ Restless legs syndrome

☐ Mixed unclear

☐ Behavioural sleep difficulty

☐ Other:

5. MANAGEMENT PLAN

Non-pharmacological

☐ Sleep hygiene education

☐ Behavioural strategies

☐ Carer-supported strategies

Medication

☐ Medication considered/reviewed

☐ Rationale documented

☐ Lowest effective dose

6. REFERRALS & MDT INPUT

☐ GP (informed involved)

☐ LD Psychiatry

☐ Sleep Medicine Respiratory

☐ Neurology

☐ Other MDT input

Considered

Action/Outcome

Standardised assessment across key domains.

Guides differential diagnosis and holistic management.

Emphasises behavioural interventions before medication.

Supports MDT input and communication with GPs and specialists.

Designed for adults with learning disabilities and carer involvement.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- Routine sleep assessment was inconsistent and frequently incomplete in adults with learning disabilities.
- A structured Sleep Assessment & Management Tool was successfully developed to address identified gaps.
- Implementation has commenced with staff education delivered.
- PDSA Cycle 2 will determine the impact on assessment quality, consistency and patient outcomes.

Improving sleep assessment is an essential step towards better health, wellbeing and quality of life for adults with learning disabilities.

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