

‘A’ for Adjustment – Case study for session 4 - Assessment

Story about Z and the learning disability general anaesthetic list

Derriford Hospital has a learning disability general anaesthetic day procedure clinic for people who would struggle to undergo some procedures. The following story demonstrates how the clinic benefitted one man.

Z is a 20 year old man with a learning disability and severe autism. He cannot verbally communicate and in addition he does not express pain, even if it's extreme. Z's parents had noticed a change in his mood. Instead of jumping out of bed in the morning he was 'sluggish' and not keen to get up. His parents at first put this down to restless nights and being tired. When it continued and he spent longer in bed they called the GP. The GP could not find any medical underlying cause and said it must be behavioural.

As the weeks went on his parents became more concerned as this behaviour just wasn't him. Eventually Z didn't want to go out and when he did, he could not walk far so the parents had to get a wheelchair. Finally, they convinced the GP to refer Z to neurology department. As Z did not display pain and couldn't state what was happening the consultant felt it wasn't neurological and it was likely to be behavioural.

Over the next few weeks Z began to become incontinent. His parents were so concerned they called the Learning Disability Liaison nurse to come to the next neurology appointment. At the appointment, it became clear that one of the barriers to getting a diagnosis was getting a CT scan to the head, as Z found it difficult to keep still. The Liaison Nurse explained that there was a learning disability general anaesthetic clinic at the hospital and got him on the list two weeks later.

During the general anaesthetic, they did a CT scan of Z's neck and back. Z was found to have a herniated disc needing surgery. Following surgery Z improved, regaining control of his bladder and improving his walking. He was also much happier in himself, and is now back doing his normal activities.

Feedback from Survey Completed by Z's Mother:

On the day of surgery the parents supporting Z said they knew what was going to happen in advance including how best to get to hospital ward and park close by. This was very useful and eased their and Z's anxiety. Mum stated the staff involved had been made aware of Z's learning disability and autism, so appropriate reasonable adjustments could be made, including support from the Learning Disability Liaison Nurses, quiet areas and provision for the family to be with him most of the day.

Mum felt that all the staff involved that day was excellent; they understood Z and were helpful towards family. Mum felt having the Liaison Nurse on hand was invaluable. Mum is certain that it made the experience of having a CT scan for Z possible and easier. Her final comment was that having the learning disability general anaesthetic list is a must for Z and others with similar challenges accessing investigations.


Health Education England



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