

## The pros and cons of meeting etiquette

### A person-centred focus... how not to!

In its most hypocritical guise, we set up meetings to review progress with people, inviting them and their carers to attend. They appear on the attendance list and may even have signed pieces of paper to signify their involvement and agreement in the whole process. But, in reality:

- They were greeted by a very formal looking audience of multidisciplinary professionals all armed with papers and reports... a hostile and intimidating environment even for many people not handicapped by a condition or disability
- Discussions took place amongst the professionals before they were invited in... an attempt to make more effective use of limited time
- Information was presented in a baffling language attempting to explain their predicament... it is a service setting, so the etiquette requires staff to present in professional language
- They felt described as a set of problems and difficulties, a challenge to be managed and sorted out by the assembled professionals... which most certainly establishes the person's place at the bottom of any perceived hierarchy
- As an addendum, they were asked if there is anything else they wanted to discuss... thus ticking the person-centred box
- And finally, they were left in no uncertain terms that the assembled mass are very busy people with other places to go, so a signature on a prepared plan would be most helpful to everyone in the room... for some service users, this is the point, where signing at least gets you out of here!

Fortunately, not many review meetings follow this service-oriented script, and there are many examples of flexible and creative practice where the aim is genuinely to help the person to be at the centre of a process and experiencing control of their care and support. However, in busy pressurised services person-centred practice can easily become a hindrance in the face of pressures to get the contact number targets met. It is easier, and less anxiety provoking for many practitioners, to say we have been person-centred and point to vague evidence for the claim, whilst really prioritising time in a way that serves the demands of the bureaucracy.

How much of the above happens in your current meetings?

## Strengths-focused meetings

A team can proactively reproduce some of the key features of effective support in clinical review meetings, or in meetings specifically dedicated to staff support. Clinical review meetings are at the heart of effective teamworking, and the experience of them should demonstrate the key values underpinning the work. They should therefore generate:

- Hope ~ inculcating a view of service users as whole people with futures and valuable roles to play
- Affirmation ~ the recognition of the work being undertaken
- Information ~ the sharing and clarification of details
- Ideas ~ generating new options
- Fun ~ to ensure colleagues in the team are enjoying their work.

The process should be personal and in the here and now, rather than deviating into abstract concepts, or an over-professionalised discourse that does not result in a clear way forward. An effective meeting will also be characterised by active listening to colleagues, valuing different opinions and viewpoints. Brainstorming ideas concerning a particular challenge also demonstrates participative safety, generates creativity, and contributes to the fun of teamworking. Remember, that in this type of team there is no such thing as a bad idea... even the wacky and unrealistic of ideas can at least spark some creative thinking... leading to new potentially workable ideas.

How much of the above happens in your current meetings?