

Human factors : Understanding the system factors for the prescribing of antipsychotics used for behaviour that challenges in people with learning disability

Overview of work

A system review was undertaken to understand the reasons psychotropic medication was prescribed, and continued long-term, for behaviour that challenges in people with learning disability. This understanding was used to determine that a whole system improvement approach was needed for a national quality improvement programme that aimed to reduce the inappropriate prescribing and resultant harm from psychotropic medication in this population.

Aim

To use a human factors approach to understand the system factors that increase the likelihood of inappropriate prescribing of psychotropics used for behaviour that challenges in people with a learning disability.

What was the problem?

Psychotropics e.g. antipsychotics are high risk medication that cause significant patient harm and reduce quality of life. Behaviour that challenges is not a clinical condition but an indicator of unmet need and should not be treated in the long-term by prescribing psychotropics.

There are 30-35,000 adults with learning disability, potentially prescribed psychotropics for behaviour that challenges. Prescribing also occurs in children of all ages.

It was important to understand the challenges in the system to improve quality of care.

Human Factors approach

- National **appreciative inquiry** – capturing local work
- **Literature review**
- **Interviews** with national leads
- Review of **system factors**
- **AcciMap**

Main findings or outcomes

The findings were analysed using an AcciMap that showed the current challenges that lead to potentially inappropriate prescribing were across the health and social care system. **The resultant map is provided on the next slide.**

This work, along with other scoping work, highlighted that the challenges are across the system. Focussing on one area would not result in sustained improvement, so a whole system approach was needed.

A whole system approach was commissioned by NHSE to be implemented across England by all Patient Safety Collaboratives from April 2025.

What were the benefits of taking a human factors approach?

- **Applied a systems-thinking approach** to identify challenges that prevented a “blame” approach to prescribing.
- **Enabled a clear visual of the system**, that summarised the challenges and allowed system colleagues to validate.
- **Supported understanding**, which allowed an appropriate improvement approach to be agreed for a national programme.

Human factors improved understanding of the system.

