**EVALUATION OF THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF HEALTH CARE FOR DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS TOOLKIT**

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**Objectives:** Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have higher rates of chronic disease and mental illness than other adults, yet they experience greater challenges accessing appropriate health care services. Community agencies play a key role in supporting adults with IDD in managing their health and accessing care. This project is a partnership between Vita Community Living Services, the Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities Program, and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Vita has identified gaps in training Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) on health care issues common to adults with IDD and on navigating and collaborating with health services.

The aim of this study was therefore to build the capacity of DSPs to better support the health care needs of the individuals they serve. The primary objective of this study was to develop tools and processes to help DSPs in their role as health advocates and to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes.

**Method:**  We used a staged implementation approach based on the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) framework that included assessing the needs of DSPs and adults with IDD and reviewing current practices, followed by tool development, trialing, and refinement. Feedback on gaps in knowledge and training was obtained via focus groups and interviews from DSPs (n=60), supervisors/directors (n=14), adults with IDD (n=27), pharmacists (n=2) and physicians (n=6) to inform what to implement and how to implement successfully. Key needs identified included DSPs having difficulties with decision making and consent, preparing for a health care visit, effectively supporting people in waiting rooms, communicating with health providers, and understanding concerns related to aging. Based on this feedback, the team developed a toolkit with informational resources, communication tools, and decision tools to support DSPs. The toolkit was implemented in all Vita programs supported through a train-the-trainer model in which a group of DSPs and supervisors were trained to provide training to all Vita DSPs on the new tools.

We are currently in the process of evaluating the initial implementation of the project as we move toward full implementation. The evaluation process will include conducting focus groups and interviews with DSPs and adults with IDD, a staff survey, and a file audit to assess use of selected tools.

**Results:** Key findings from the evaluation of the project pertaining to the following areas will be included in the presentation: (1) Are staff using the tools?; (2) Have the tools and training helped address the needs identified at the beginning of the project?; (3) What were some barriers or facilitators to implementing the toolkit?

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The toolkit that we created for this project will eventually be available to all developmental services agencies in Ontario. Importantly, being able to use these resources will build the capacity of DSPs to better support adults with IDD to access, manage, and coordinate their health care. Evaluating the use of the toolkits at Vita will ensure that the tools we distribute to other agencies are effective and that they target the needs of DSPs.

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