

Project Title: Understanding the Communication Experiences of Patients with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Healthcare Settings

Community Agency: Champlain Community Services

Abstract

Background:

Recent studies demonstrate that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) face communication challenges in healthcare settings. To evaluate the efficacy of communication between healthcare providers (HCPs) and individuals with IDD in Vermont, we surveyed and interviewed HCPs, direct support professionals (DSPs) and individuals with IDD.

Methods:

We used a mixed methods approach to evaluate communication challenges patients with IDD face. Surveys were distributed to HCPs, DSPs and individuals with IDD. The surveys indicated the communication strategies preferred by each group and measured the experience level of HCPs and DSPs working with individuals with IDD. Individuals with IDD and DSPs were interviewed. Quantitative data were compared using non-parametric tests, with linear regression identifying factors related to patient comfort. Qualitative data were categorized by common themes.

Results:

91 surveys were completed by 18 DSPs, 2 individuals with IDD, and 71 HCPs. The proportion of HCPs with >5 years of experience working with IDD patients was significantly higher than DSPs (90.1% vs 66.7%, $p=0.003$). However, 55.6% of DSPs reported witnessing communication challenges between individuals with IDD and HCPs. The proportion of HCPs that routinely ask patients with IDD how they best communicate was significantly lower than the proportion of DSPs willing to share this information (50.7% vs 91.7%, $p=0.010$).

Conclusion:

Despite high levels of provider experience, communication in the healthcare setting remains challenging for individuals with IDD. Areas for improvement include targeted interventions such as personalized communication tools and patient-centered approaches. HCPs must address these factors to improve quality of care for individuals with IDD.

Students: Ashwini Sarathy, Ty Bever, Richard Q. Vuong, Aathmika Krishnan, Olivia Domingue, Rachel Thompson, Charlotte Evans, Michael H. Le

UVM Faculty Mentors: Steven Everse

Community Mentors: Mike Reilly