

SPARC

Sheffield Profile for Assessment and Referral to Care: a feasibility study

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This is a feasibility study of an holistic needs assessment questionnaire in a supportive and palliative care service'

We are carrying out a study with patients referred for supportive or palliative care, to see if using the SPARC questionnaire improves their care. The aims are to:

- determine the effect of holistic needs assessment on health-related quality of life and self-identified concerns in patients referred for supportive and palliative care
- determine the effect of holistic needs assessment on interventions, consultations and referrals within supportive and palliative care
- measure the difference at baseline assessment between patients identified as cancer survivors, those living with a long-term condition and those receiving end-of-life care, in terms of their concerns, quality of life and need for supportive or palliative care.

Two papers were submitted during 2012 to:

- (1) Health Expectations and
- (2) BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care journals.

Main findings

Our first analysis done at the end of the study period and before recruitment was complete, detected no effect from the use of SPARC in specialist palliative care services at 2 weeks. We detected no difference between cancer survivors and other diseases. We failed to detect a difference in our initial analysis. A process evaluation is an integral element of randomised controlled trials. The SPARC feasibility trial funded by Macmillan Cancer Support focused primarily on outcomes, not on the processes involved in implementing the intervention. A proposal to undertake a process evaluation for the SPARC study was submitted to Macmillan in October 2012. During the SPARC feasibility study, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with patients (n=33) and health professionals (n=20). In addition, 130 case notes were reviewed. The analysis of this data will inform the design of a definitive clinical trial.

Implications for research and practice

This work will highlight some of the difficulties and challenges experienced during the feasibility trial, identify facilitators and barriers to implementation of SPARC, and be a useful guide for researchers designing future supportive and palliative care complex trials.