Reviewer's report

Title: More age-care staff report helping care recipients following a brief depression awareness raising intervention

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Reviewer: Mark Haddad

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Overall comments: The study by Atkins and colleagues addresses a topic of public health importance, and of interest to service providers and educators. The questions posed by the investigators are clearly delineated – and are examined by methods which are adequate and well-reported.

The focus on self-efficacy in relation to providing support and assistance for older people with depression appears relevant to this area and an addition to scientific knowledge.

The study methods and approach to data analysis are clearly described and appropriate for the data type and study design. Likewise, the presentation of data, analyses and findings are clearly presented.

The discussion of the results would merit from some alteration, with a more cautious interpretation of some of the findings – which are derived from an uncontrolled study utilising novel and untested measures of the key variables.

Overall, I recommend this work publication in BMC Nursing with minor revisions.

Minor issues not for publication: Not usually necessary or appropriate to note ‘e.g.’ prior to a referenced work (e.g. 5…): citation/ referencing per se notes the relevance of the cited work.

Discretionary Revisions:

The term ‘low care.. staff’ (introduction, third paragraph) although commonly used in Australia, possibly requires a brief explanation at point of first use for an international audience.

Minor Essential Revisions:

The background paragraph (5) that remarks upon improving detection rates does not necessarily translate to changes in clinical responses would be usefully amplified by reference to meta-analyses that have indicated that case-finding or screening questionnaires for depression appear to have little or no impact on its management by clinicians e.g. Gilbody et al 2008 CMAJ 178: 997-1003

The statement in the final section of the background that - ‘… no previous research appears to have explored unprompted knowledge of appropriate help giving behaviours or examined the knowledge and confidence of staff in high care environments..’ somewhat overstates the point and may merit some further

Consider change to e.g.'... Although other research has examined the knowledge and confidence of staff...., to our knowledge other studies have not explored unprompted knowledge of appropriate help giving behaviours…'

In the Results, change/ add e.g. - Table 3: Proportion of staff who REPORTED PROVIDING ASISTANCE TYPES before training (BT) and six month follow up (FU).

In the Discussion section (paragraph 2), the authors note that: ‘.. In addition, nurses were no more likely than other staff members to help care recipients who were potentially depressed. This is of concern as it is may be the nurses’ role to liaise with GPs and ensure that care recipients receive help.’

The discussion of this finding should be couched more tentatively: e.g. ‘... nurses reported they were no more likely… If this accurately indicates their actual clinical responses it would be of concern as it is likely to be nurses’ role to liaise…’

Similarly with this paragraph, the authors note: ‘...In the current study …it is of considerable concern that they did not have either greater knowledge of depression or were more likely to help than other groups of staff.’

The study measures did not examine knowledge of depression per se – so an alteration to e.g. ‘greater knowledge of appropriate responses to depression’

This clarification would also be helpful in the 4th paragraph where the authors state: ‘Those with previous training … did not have greater levels of knowledge.’ (i.e. ..of appropriate ways of assisting care recipients with depressive symptoms.’

Consideration of the study limitations should (rather than simply stating the design was no an RCT) note that because this study was a single group pre-test post-test design, - so - because there was no comparator group - any changes identified in the measured variables may be due to historical, maturation, and testing effects.

The authors should also note that the generalizability (external validity) may be limited by both the selection of staff from a specific geographical location, as well the response/ participation rate.

The authors rightly note potential deficits in the approaches to measurement.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
None.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests