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After graduating with a degree in Pharmacology in 2002, Helen qualified as a Registered Veterinary Nurse in 2005. She began a nine-year stint as a locum nurse working nationally and internationally, developing experience in referral medicine and surgery, charity practice, emergency nursing and exotics. During this time she spent five years on the BVNA council in a variety of roles, culminating in her being awarded honorary membership in 2016.

In 2013 she qualified as a human-centred nurse; after two years working on intensive care, she moved to the transplant team supporting patients pre- and post-transplant. Currently she works at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge on the Transplant High Dependency Unit.

Helen remains a Registered Veterinary Nurse and has developed a strong interest in the principles of One Health and chairs the Veterinary Nursing Futures One Health Committee. She regularly lectures and writes about concepts and ways of working that may be shared between the professions to support clinical and professional practice. Her first textbook, on Veterinary Nursing Care Plans, was published earlier this year. She is currently working on an MSc in Healthcare Management.
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An introduction to change management theory for veterinary nurses: part two

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ABSTRACT: Managing a sustained change in veterinary practice is challenging. This article applies the Nursing Process to Change Management, which, while not a formal change management tool, is a framework veterinary nurses are familiar with and provides a succinct introduction to using a formal structure for change management. Using practical examples, the article will define and explain the relevance of applying problem analysis tools, developing a succinct vision of change, recruiting enthusiastic change agents and facilitating stakeholder engagement. It aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to this vast topic creating a robust foundation of knowledge on which to build further.

Keywords: Change management; change implementation; nursing process

Part one of this article introduced the use of change management tools to facilitate effective and sustained change management. It linked several of those tools to the well-known framework of nursing, Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (Yura & Walsh, 1967). While the Nursing Process is not a formal change management tool, in this introduction to change management, it serves as an aide to understanding the processes required to manage a change in established practice. It is hoped that the use of a familiar model will allow the reader to concentrate on the stages of the change management process and practice applying them in a structured manner. Once a level of confidence is achieved with working in this structured way, application of more detailed change management tools may be more valuable.

Applying the nursing process to change management (Figure 1)

Assessment: the theory

The assessment stage of change management is an investigatory phase and involves asking what needs to change and why it needs to change. It consists of four clear stages, situational analysis, stakeholder consultation, resource analysis and gathering senior management support.

Situational analysis

Very often, a change in practice is required in response to a specific problem. Taking the time to comprehend the problem thoroughly is a key step in the change management process. It ensures that there are no simple fixes being missed: for example, has a piece of equipment been broken and would mending it solve the problem?

If there is no quick solution, the use of formal problem analysis tools is a useful method of gathering information. A commonly used tool within human-centred nursing is the Root Cause Analysis (RCA), which seeks to address the "root" of the problem from a systemic perspective. It states a clear and specific problem and aims to ask: What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen? What solutions can be developed and fed back to staff? (Phillips & Simmonds, 2013.)

As part of a RCA, the Five Whys tool may be used to encourage a greater depth of understanding into the problem. Figure 2 presents an example of this tool, using an example of client feedback about the

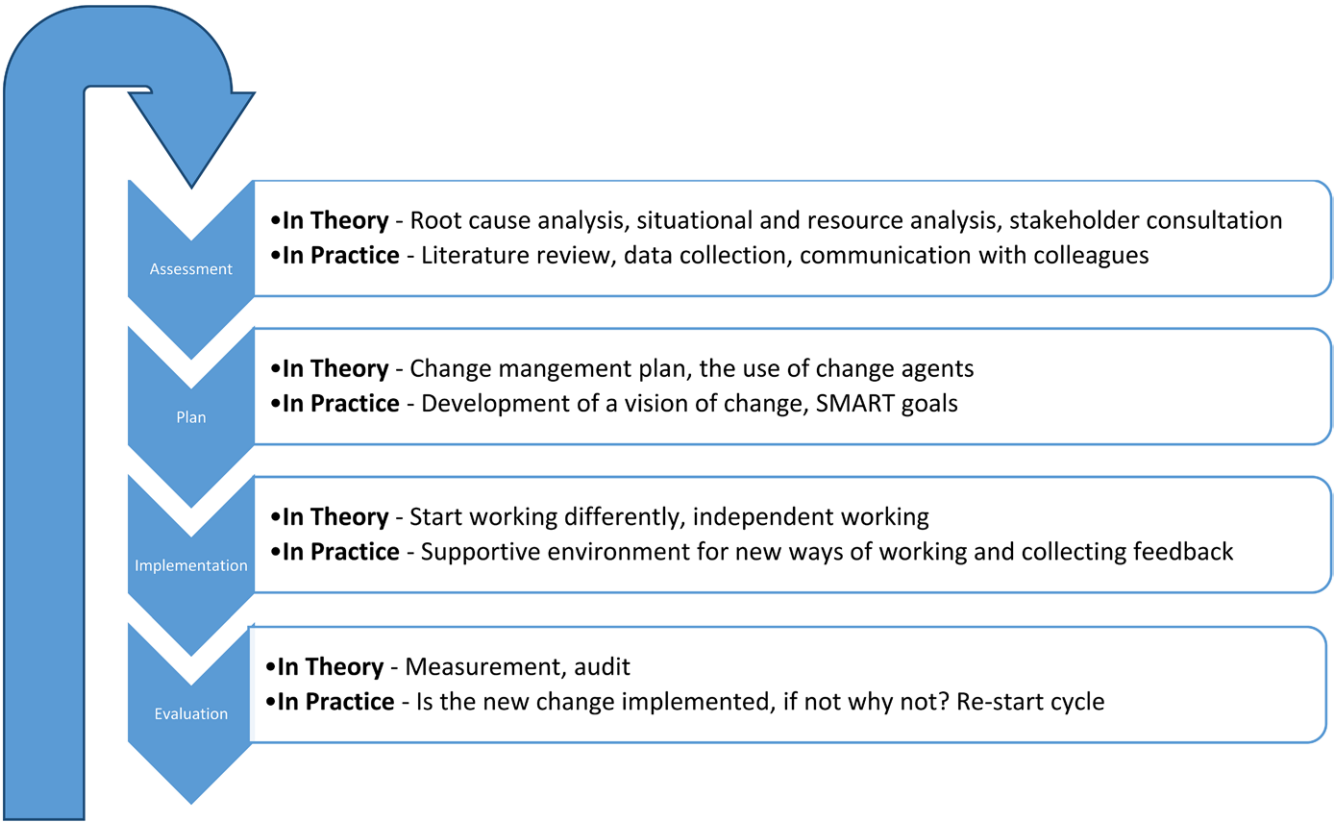

Figure 1. Flow chart to demonstrate application of the nursing process to change management.

discharge of patients after an operation. There is a clear and specific statement of the problem and "why?" is asked five times. This repetition facilitates identification of all the possible causes of a problem, rather than just the most obvious ones. While the Five Whys is a standardised template, it is worth noting that for specific cases, identifying a root cause may take more or less questioning so the template should be adapted accordingly. In the example in Figure 2, the obvious solution is to start to book timed appointments for the clients collecting their animals after surgery. However, once the Five Whys analysis has been collated, it is clear this is not the only problem and other elements need to be addressed.

Stakeholder consultation

As part of the investigation of a problem and as a precursor to introducing change all members of the team that the change will affect should be consulted. Known as stakeholders, early engagement with this group provides a baseline opinion on the appetite for change within a working environment. Taking the time to listen to stakeholders can begin the identification of potential motivators and barriers to change related to both logistics and personnel. Stakeholder engagement should not be reserved exclusively for the assessment stage. Keeping stakeholders informed as the process of change continues empowers them and may reduce resistance to change (Phelan 2010).

To ensure accuracy and effectiveness, it is essential that tools such as the RCA are used in collaboration with stakeholders within a no-blame environment, with emphasis on the situation and system rather than any specific person. If stakeholders are concerned about being blamed for a situation, they are far less likely to engage fully in the process and less likely to suggest useful and constructive solutions.

Resource analysis

When beginning a change management project, it is essential that there is an assessment of the resources likely to be needed for the work. Inadequate resources will hinder implementation of change and may lead to the project failing altogether (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

Senior management support

Within this final stage, once information has been collated, it is essential to gather support from senior management. This is likely to involve making a case for change, potentially with a business case.

Assessment: the practice

Practically, the assessment phase delivers a list of action points for VNs wishing to introduce a change in practice.

1. Know and understand exactly why the change in practice is needed.
2. Examine current practice to begin a situational analysis of existing systems.
3. Consider performing a literature review on the relevant topic to gather evidence for ways of working.
4. If the motivator for change is a problem or issue, investigate it thoroughly using a problem analysis tool so conclusions can be drawn as to the causes of the problem and potential solutions can be designed.
5. Ensure that conversations about the prospective change are held with all levels of the practice team; allow all stakeholders to contribute to any root cause analysis if applicable; if not, gather opinion and interest about the potential change.
6. Speak to senior members of the team to ask specific questions about resources and appetite for change. Most VNs need senior-level support to implement change (unless they are practice owners), so obtaining support early on is crucial to prevent wasted time, passion and energy.

Planning: the theory

Planning the change is crucial; preparation is a key part of supporting colleagues to work in new ways. Again, there are individual stages to this part of the process. First, there is

Figure 2. The Five Whys analysis applied to a problem with long waiting times.

a need for formulation and documentation of a clear plan of action, with a succinct and comprehensible vision with detailed goals. Second, there should be an emphasis placed on the formation of a change management team consisting of individual change agents. Finally, thought should be given to how the change will be communicated throughout the team.

Formulation of a change management plan

Evidence suggests that change that is associated with a clearly articulated vision and explicit goals is more sustainable (Dixon-Woods et al 2014). Writing a vision for a change project can be challenging. It needs to be short and succinct so it is easy to understand and share with others. A more detailed element of the change management plan is the use of SMART goals. Using SMART goals, which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely, provides a structured breakdown of details of the change management plan so that stakeholders are able to see clearly which goals apply to them and how they can go about achieving them.

Change agents

There is evidence to demonstrate that autocratic top-down change implementation seldom results in sustained changes to practice and can lead to low motivation levels and poor morale (Mitchell 2013). In contrast, the use of staff members who are working in a frontline capacity as change agents who can share the vision and goals of the change are a crucial tool to disseminate information and gather support and enthusiasm for change. Enlisting a formal commitment from the change agents allows promotion of their role to all members of the team so they know who to approach for more information before, during and after the implementation of change.

Communication plan

Allen (2016) advocates that a variety of communication methods should be used to ensure that key messages are received about the change and to facilitate ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Planning: the practice

Consider the implementation of a change in the brand of veterinary prescription diet used in a practice due to the need for an increased range of products and a beneficial business opportunity. Such a change has the potential to have a significant impact on the veterinary nurses within the practice team.

The vision for this change should incorporate the key reasons the change is being implemented. As an example, in this case, it may be as simple as "being able to provide a greater range of products for our clients". An example of a SMART goal for this nursing team may be the completion of a formal online training programme provided by the new supplier. A specific task is required, it can be measured by evidence of its completion and time should be made available at work to ensure that completing the course is achievable. The relevance is explicit and a deadline should be placed to ensure that all members of the team have achieved their goal in time for the implementation of the new products.

Different members of the team will have different needs to take into account. As an example, VNs who have only used one product range their entire professional life may struggle more than locum nurses who regularly use different products.

Fisher (2005) describes how change can be very difficult for those established in long-term work patterns. Being able to see a written plan of the change and comprehending why the change is needed will go a long way to allay any fears of the new product.

The selection of change agents from the practice team is a crucial aspect of planning. It is important to ensure a broad cross-section of disciplines is represented. Always consider the use of nursing or veterinary students – they are relevant stakeholders, with contemporary knowledge. They can be excellent change agents with time and enthusiasm to spread knowledge and gather support for new ways of working.

As emphasised within the assessment stage, communication with stakeholders is an ongoing process, with the potential for new stakeholders to evolve at different stages of the change implementation process. The clients of a practice do not need to know that the team might be considering a new way of working; however, using the veterinary prescription diets example, once a supplier is changed, wider dissemination of information to the client base may take pressure off the reception and nursing team as clients are prepared for new products at the practice.

Implementation: the theory

Implementing the change is the practical application of changing the way of working. There are three key stages to this part in the process: starting to work differently and seeking and, crucially, accepting widespread feedback from stakeholders as they practice the new way of working. The third stage is the withdrawal of the change agents, who have initiated and supported the change within the frontline working environment.

Implementation: the practice

Practically, beginning a new way of working simply needs the team to start. Ideally, change agents should be strategically placed to provide practical support to their colleagues. They need to be educated to understand that change isn't easy for everyone and that providing ongoing guidance and support is an essential part of the process.

The change agents should be asked to collect and document feedback on the new way of working. Staff should also be encouraged to document their own feedback. It is important that those implementing the change accept such feedback with humility. Any hostility or dismissal of staff opinions could sabotage the process as staff members start to resist the change if they perceive their opinions to have been ignored.

The withdrawal of change agent support for the new way of working may be carried out gradually or according to a specific deadline. Either way, all staff should be aware of when that formal support will cease so that they can ask for further help and assistance should they require it.

Evaluation: the theory

The evaluation requires measurement of the new way of working, which needs to be assessed in two ways. First, it should be measured if the new ways of working are actually being practiced; second, an assessment needs to be made as to whether the new ways of working are actually fulfilling the vision or addressing the problem they were designed for.

Evaluation: the practice

One of the most important tools for this stage of the process is the audit. An audit is simply a process of examination of systems or ways of working. Using the example of the change in veterinary prescription diets, an audit might be as simple as establishing what numbers of the new diets are being utilised. If all the prescription diets being ordered are from the new supplier, then the project can be considered a success. This should not lead to complacency; regular measurement and checking at set intervals can help to ensure change is sustained long-term.

If it is concluded the original brand of diets is still being used more than the new ones, then the process has broken down somewhere. At this stage, the entire process may begin again with a problem analysis tool. Applying an RCA to the situation should allow conclusions to be drawn as to why the new product is not being used. Is it client preference? Are there problems obtaining the new products? Is there a price change that VNs are struggling to explain to clients? There can be many reasons why the change may not be going well and an RCA should reveal them. Once revealed, strategies may be designed and implemented through the re-enlisting of change agents, stakeholder engagement and ongoing measurement.

Conclusion

Managing the implementation of change within the veterinary environment can be challenging. Using a change management tool can help plan, implement and evaluate the process of change contributing towards an effective and sustained change in practice.

For veterinary nurses who are new to managing change within a team, applying the nursing process of Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation can be a useful and familiar framework to support the change. Once individuals are more confident, the use of more detailed, specific change management tools may be more appropriate.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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