Audio Books for Dementia Patients
An RUH Academy Library Initiative

The idea

Background
A patient story was presented to the RUH Trust board in May 2017 which highlighted the need for activities to help keep patients with dementia stimulated and engaged during their time in hospital. Audiobooks were suggested as a useful tool to help alleviate the boredom of being in hospital; they could also help with some behavioural issues associated with dementia.

The process

When a request comes into the library - usually through one of the dementia co-ordinators or a member of ward staff - we spend some time finding out about the patient’s needs, and what kind of listening material they might enjoy.

We then search through the online Listening Books library to find an appropriate choice. We can search by genre, author, subject and audience, and choose from thousands of titles. The titles are downloaded onto the player, and a borrower form and spreadsheet filled out.

The future

As this project has progressed, we have inevitably come across a few problems that need resolving. One issue has been ensuring that the players, headphones and power cables are all returned. Despite clear labelling and instruction, a few pieces of equipment have gone missing.

The audioplayer and headphones are then taken to the ward. Here we demonstrate how the player works, either to the patient, their family or a member of staff, depending on which is most appropriate. The patient can request another book at any point and can keep the audioplayer for as long as they like. After about a week, we will phone the ward to check on the patient’s progress, and enquire if they would like new listening material. When they have finished with the player, or when they are discharged, we collect the audioplayer, player & headphones and gather feedback.

We have had some great feedback:

“Really enjoyed listening to the audiobooks, thank you!”

“The audioplayer was the only thing that calmed down the patient, who was very distressed”

The innovative idea that we have developed is to run a one year project to provide the opportunity for patients with dementia to borrow a dementia friendly audioplayer during their stay on our wards. Preloaded with audiobooks and radio / TV programmes, the audioplayers will help keep them stimulated and engaged, providing focus and relieving some of the boredom of being in hospital - without too much input from staff. Our dementia co-ordinators and ward staff would identify patients for whom audiobooks would be helpful; our dementia volunteers would assist our patients in using the audio-players where required, choosing appropriate books available from the Academy Library.

In March 2018 we applied to our Innovation panel for £1600 funding. The proposal was to purchase ten dementia friendly Simple Music Players which can have audiobooks preloaded by library staff. A subscription was needed to an audiobooks downloading service. Earphones were also purchased along with a request for funding one hour per week of Band 3 time, factored in to administer the project.

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The project has been running since July 2018. Usage has been good following a soft launch. This approach was taken to help iron out any unforeseen issues. We expected to lose headphones and possibly the odd Simple Music Player, but surprisingly we have lost a couple of power cables (possibly because they resemble phone chargers). In September we have publicised the project in our Trust monthly newspaper so we hope that usage will continue to increase.

Some of the issues we have encountered so far include:

- Patients often forget to return the audioplayers if they have taken them home.
- The players are quite bulky, and are sometimes dropped. We have had several accidents where the volume was set too high.

We have been working hard to resolve these issues. In March 2019 we were awarded a further £1500 funding for 10 additional Simple Music Players which have been preloaded with audiobooks.

The project is due to run until June 2019.