

This story is based on data collected by observing the work of a community health and social care team during an independent research project funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The characters named in the story are fictional and not based on any one individual.

Special thanks go to Alison Hargreaves, Denise Hill, Tessa Holmes, Joe Langley, Alison Powell, Sarah Walker, Matthew Wilson and David Woodcock for their help with analysing the data and producing this story.

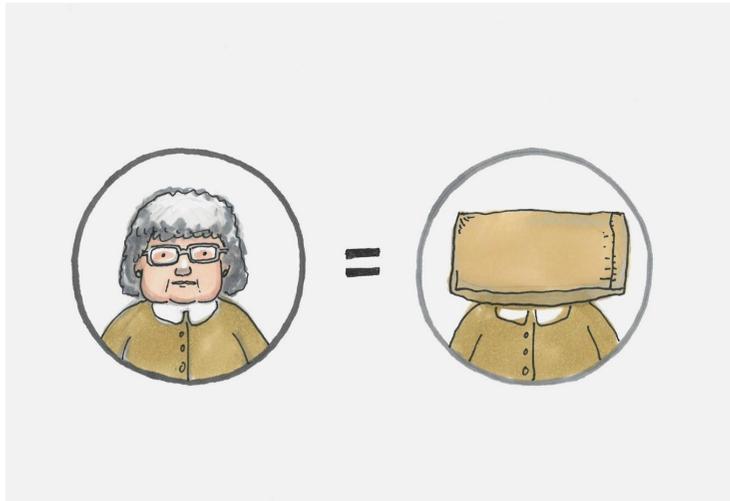
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This story is about the Ashgrove community health and social care team. The team is made up of lots of different health and social care professionals like nurses, social workers and physiotherapists. Their job is to work together to look after people living in the local community. This is a story about what their knowledge sharing looks like.

The story is designed to illustrate a number of lessons about how groups of people share knowledge. At these points you will find a box containing a short commentary and some questions which could be used to encourage knowledge sharing. At the end of the story you will find a short summary of these lessons and some further details about the questions.



Into that chaotic world comes Joan. Joan is being looked after by the Ashgrove team and once a week they get together to think and talk about the kind of help and support that she needs.

To newcomers it can sometimes seem as though Joan is being treated as if she is a parcel. The Ashgrove team package her up and put a label on her and the difficulties she is having. This makes her a bit more abstract but means that they can throw ideas and suggestions into the pot about how to get her the help that she needs.



Groups of people are able to share knowledge when they identify that what they are discussing (Joan and her difficulties) is part of a broader pattern. It can be difficult to identify these patterns. Questions to help include “have we dealt with a situation like this before?” and “what do we know about how to address this situation?”



Some of the ideas and suggestions that people throw into the pot aren't very welcome or seem impossible to achieve. It sometimes looks as if people are holding up shields to protect themselves from these ideas. These shields are made up of rules about the way that things are done, who has permission to do what or the kinds of things that are OK to say or suggest.

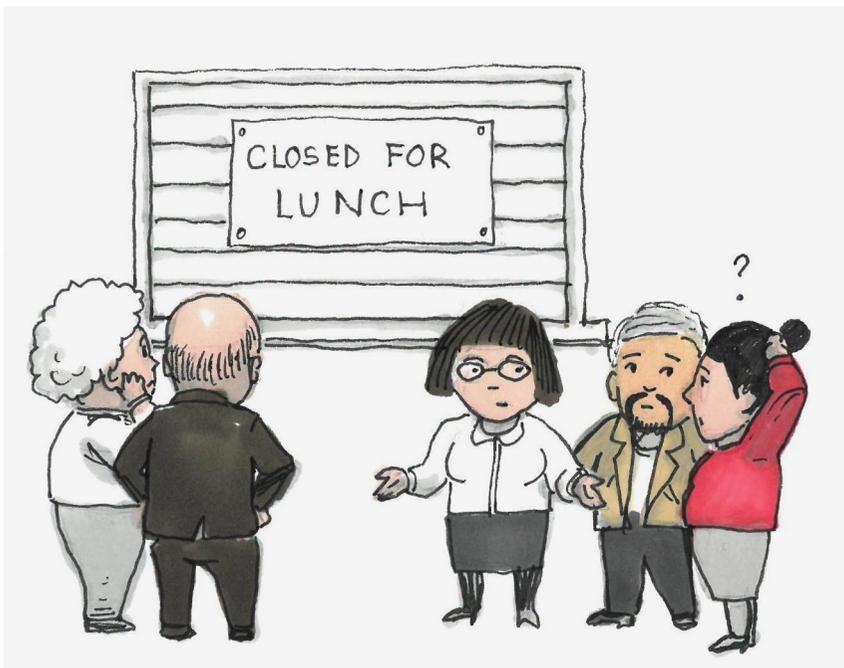
When groups of people are dealing with challenging situations (like how to help Joan) it can be difficult for them to receive knowledge and ideas from one another. Hierarchies and rules can also make it difficult to use that knowledge. Questions to help include "who do we need to listen to?", "what are we struggling with?" and "what might influence our ability to use knowledge?"



When the Ashgrove team get to the stage of trying to get Joan the support that she needs, they often run into problems.

Sometimes they don't know which label to use, and so end up using the wrong label for Joan or the difficulties that she is having. This means that she gets handed back to them pretty quickly and the team don't manage to get her the help that she needs.

Groups of people often use labels or categories as a way of sharing knowledge about a complex situation (like Joan's). Although this can be useful, it can be difficult for other groups of people to work out what these labels mean. Questions to help include "how do we capture what we know?" and "how do we share what we know?"



Often it will only be one person in the team that has a connection to a service that Joan needs. If they're not around it's difficult for the team to work out who else could help.

Connections and relationships are an important part of how groups of people find and access knowledge. It can be difficult to identify and develop these connections. Questions which could help include "who else might know something about this situation?" and "who do we need to talk to?"

This story has illustrated a number of important lessons about knowledge sharing. In summary, the Ashgrove team are able to share knowledge and ideas with each other when they identify that the people and situations they are discussing are part of a broader pattern. Using labels and categories helps them to identify these patterns.

The team also faces a number of challenges when trying to share knowledge. The complex setting that they work in makes it difficult for them to identify what they need to know and the rules and hierarchies within that setting make it difficult to use that knowledge. It is also difficult for team members to contribute new knowledge and ideas. Using the wrong labels and categories stops them from sharing knowledge with other groups and accessing the knowledge that they need.

One way of dealing with these and other challenges is to ask questions like those shown in the boxes on the previous pages. These questions have been designed to help groups of people to share knowledge when they are dealing with difficult situations where there are no clear answers (such as how best to help someone like Joan). The questions focus on helping groups of people to think and talk about their main area of concern, what they do and don't know and how they will access and use knowledge to address the situation they are dealing with.

For details of where you can find out more about these knowledge sharing questions please turn the page.

About the author

Vicky Ward is an academic from the University of St Andrews. Her work focuses on how people share knowledge with each other and how they can be supported to do so.

Between October 2014 and November 2016 she looked at how knowledge was shared during case management meetings in community health and social care teams. She also developed and tested a set of questions designed to help these teams to share knowledge.

To find out more about the project and download resources please visit

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