West of Berkshire
Safeguarding Adults Board
Reading, West Berkshire & Wokingham

Case Study
Use of Clinical Language

Case summary:

Robert was an elderly gentleman with significant health needs being cared for at home with a double up package of care delivered 4 times daily. This included personal care. In addition, district nurses were attending to dress leg ulcers twice a week and moisture lesions to the sacrum.

Robert was admitted to hospital. During the initial examination a consultant on duty called Roberts family and referenced a 'tear' on the bottom. The consultant did not elaborate on the cause of the 'tear'. From this conversation the family believed the 'tear' was caused by the care agency during hoisting and raised a safeguarding alleging neglect.

Findings:

What has transpired is that the term 'tear' is a generic term used by that clinician to reference all types of abrasions to the skin. The 'tear' being the result of any number of causes; for example pressure damage, moisture lesions, fistula, an external event such as a fall or poor hoisting practice, and the list could go on.

Clinicians use terminology to describe multiple situations. Terms can be interchangeable and the meaning that others as non-clinicians apply to the information provided as part of a safeguarding enquiry could, in some instances, lead to a misunderstanding of the incident for which an enquiry is being conducted.

> Clinicians use terminology to describe multiple situations. Terms can be interchangeable

---

Responses:

Non- clinicians:

When provided with information from a clinician it is always worth asking for a fuller explanation of the terms they use. Check the language used and the meaning they are applying to the terms used. For example if a person is described as dehydrated, do check whether the clinician is referencing the person as potentially being dehydrated from not drinking enough or potentially being clinically dehydrated as a result of illness.

Do not be fearful of asking more questions so that you properly understand what you are being told.

Clinicians:

If you are able to, please do explain, in layman's terms what you mean when using clinical terminology. For example if you are using terminology that is interchangeable please do explain precisely what you mean by the term you have used.

Published January 2023