

Participants or Bystanders? Older people's participation in acute hospital discharge process in Ireland. Explaining older people's participation the acute hospital discharge process in Ireland: Research strategies

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Abstract:

The goal of Irish health policy is the delivery of person centred health systems, where citizens assume the role of active participants in decision-making about their care and services respond to individual's needs. The nature of people's participation is shaped by institutional structures and the expectations and interpretations of those involved in routine health care processes, such as the discharge process. This paper will set out the research strategies used to investigate the phenomenon older people's participation in the discharge process. The literature review highlighted the complexity of the concept 'participation'. Many different factors are linked to participation, so an approach that promotes theory of human agency but also takes account of the impact of social structures was required. Critical realism emphasises the interdependence of structure and agency. It seeks to explain and contextualize social phenomena by reference to mechanisms operating in these different strata, which are contingent upon specific contexts such as historical, geographical, social, cultural and institutional (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Two hospitals representing what could be called extreme cases in that they embody two ends of the spectrum in terms of size, location, discharge destination, facilities available were identified, St Mark's and St Paul's. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 hospital professionals involved in the discharge process in the two acute hospitals. Interviews were also carried out with 20 people, over 65, recently discharged. Through a process of abduction, lay accounts of the social world were interpreted using social theory. Retroduction inferences moved from this knowledge to knowledge of mechanisms which contribute to older people's participation in the discharge decision-making.