Background:
There are over 400,000 older people living in independent sector care homes in the UK and more than 70,000 people die each year in nursing and residential homes in the UK. With an increasing aging population it is expected that the number of people who move into residential care, as they age, will continue to rise. For many people these care settings become their home and therefore support to enable them to be cared for, and to die there if they so wish, should be promoted. The End of Life Care Strategy by the Department of Health identified high incidences of unnecessary admissions to hospital from care homes at the end of life and highlighted a need for training for care home staff.

As a result, the Six Steps to Success programme was developed in the north-west of England to underpin the organisational change required and support staff development to enhance end of life care within care homes.

Aim:
The aim of this study was to explore the impact of the Six Steps to Success programme on end of life care (EoLC) in care homes in Northwest England.

Methodology:
This was a mixed-method evaluation consisting of three phases;
1) Examination of audit data (quality markers and measures; post death information; Knowledge Skills and Confidence (KSC) audit)
2) Questionnaires and interviews with Six Steps Facilitators
3) Case studies of 6 care homes
Analysis involved descriptive statistical comparisons and frequencies; qualitative data were subject to content analysis to identify themes.

Results (selection):
1. 100% of care homes showed improvement for ‘Advance Care Planning’ and ‘Communication’
2. A majority of staff showed improvements in their Knowledge Skills and Confidence e.g. 92% improvement for Spirituality skills; 79% improvement for Advance Care Planning (ACP) knowledge.
3. Residents dying in their preferred place of death increased from 81.5% to 83.1%
4. Residents dying with an ACP in place increased from 45% to 56%.
5. EoLC documentation in care homes improved

Conclusion:
End of life care in care homes has clearly improved following participation in the programme. Greater use of EoLC tools, such as Advance Care Planning, was apparent. Knowledge skills and confidence around EoLC improved markedly amongst care home staff ensuring residents’ wishes and preferences at end of life were met. More confident and better trained care home staff are now empowered to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and to ensure that more residents are able to die in their preferred place.
Undoubtedly the Six Steps to Success programme has helped care home staff to deliver better end of life care for their residents.

“...at one point I probably would have been very uncomfortable to do that but now I haven't got a problem with it at all”. (Care home Manager)