



Best Practice – Top Hospitals 2018

Special report: Insights from the winners
of the Top Hospitals awards

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Patient experience

Patient experience is strongly linked to patient outcomes – evidence shows that patients that have a better experience of care generally have better health outcomes – so its effect on overall hospital quality, as well as the health of the nation, cannot be underestimated.

Involving patients in their own care improves their experience and empowers them to manage their conditions, reducing the likelihood that they will need to use more resources in the future. With this in mind, the NHS is endeavouring to become more patient-centric and a personalised approach to care is high on the agenda. This means treating patients as individuals; taking into account patients' preferences when making clinical decisions and delivering care that is responsive to their needs.

While many trusts have initiatives in place to work on patient experience, there is huge disparity in the quality of patient experience nationally. To tackle this, earlier in the year NHS Improvement released a patient experience improvement framework to standardise measurements of patient experience and enable each trust “to carry out an organisational diagnostic to establish how far patient experience is embedded in its leadership, culture and its operational processes”.¹

It is difficult to measure how person-centred the care delivered is, but patient satisfaction surveys and the key questions around services being caring and responsive in the CQC reports give a good indication.

Patient input is essential in showing trusts what matters to patients and where they need to improve. Not only do trusts need to be able to collect patient feedback, though, they also need to be receptive and able to learn from it, using the answers to inform decisions.

As demonstrated by this year's award winners for patient experience, real-time feedback is also highly beneficial, allowing for the identification of issues early on and supporting real-time action.

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A significant factor in patient satisfaction is determined by interaction with staff, in particular whether patients feel they are listened to, treated with dignity and respect, and also the level of confidence they have in the clinician's abilities. Increasing staff engagement and encouraging staff to lead on quality improvement, then, can lead to a better patient experience. Performance tables could be a useful tool if rolled out nationally, as revealing to staff where they measure against their colleagues or other services can also motivate them to improve.

Data sharing across the NHS could go a long way to making services more efficient and improving patient experience, reducing instances where patients have to repeat their histories to multiple care providers. This year, five regions were chosen by NHS England to be Local Health and Care Record Exemplars.

These regions will receive up to £7.5 million in funding over the next two years to design shared patient records that can be accessed across different parts of the NHS and social care system. The programme aims to facilitate better co-ordinated individual care, ultimately creating “an information sharing environment that helps our health and care services continually improve the treatments we use, ensures that care is tailored to the needs of each individual, and can empower people to look after themselves better and make informed choices about their own health and care”. The programme also hopes to produce “a set of national standards that all local health and care record initiatives across England will be required to follow”.ⁱⁱ

Case study: Real-time patient experience programme goes from strength to strength

Winner of the CHKS patient experience award for the third consecutive year, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is finding their real-time feedback initiative is paying dividends.

The real-time patient experience programme was set up in 2009 and allows the trust to make immediate changes as feedback comes in and share the responses with frontline staff within 24 hours. The programme now sees more than 50,000 patients being interviewed while in hospital every year.

Annie Laverty, chief experience officer, has been at the helm of the programme since its inception. She says the programme is now comfortably embedded in the way staff are working. “After nine years, the ownership of the programme on the wards is really strong. Staff are listening to patients and feel motivated to listen to patient feedback – they feel appreciated. It would be very difficult to walk on to the wards of Northumbria and for nursing leaders and staff to not be able to tell you what patients think about their care. The programme reinforces that the trust cares about staff and patients.”

There has been a focus on patient experience throughout the trust and the programme has really strengthened in the last 12 months, with the goal of creating a balance between real-time and right-time data. As part of the programme, the trust also follows up with patients two weeks after care, as they believe this is when patients will be most honest in their feedback, with no “gratitude barrier” present.

A change in culture has been crucial to the success of the programme and staff have found it very beneficial to have access to information about how they are doing. Laverty says: “It’s been about fostering a positive mindset and getting staff to see that we can generate change. The programme isn’t just about scores, it’s also about getting support to improve.” There is now an emphasis on developing the programme to balance staff experience and patient experience, as the trust believes the two are closely linked.

In the last year, the trust has run a collaborative for other NHS organisations, to share best practice and to help other trusts develop bespoke patient experience programmes. Laverty says: “This collaborative work has strengthened our commitment to the programme and made us feel grateful for what we have at the trust. We hope the programme is something we can scale up nationally.”

References

ⁱ <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/patient-experience-improvement-framework/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/local-health-and-care-record-exemplars-summary.pdf>