

Simple guides

Patient Experience

In this guide we seek to shed some light on the topic of patient experience – what it means, why it's important for our Trust and the wider NHS and how understanding what our patients think about our services helps us to provide the highest quality of care.

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What is patient experience?

Patient experience is commonly used as a catch-all phrase that refers to aspects of care that are over and above the medical interventions carried out in hospitals and other NHS settings.

This can include a broad range of things, for example the cleanliness of the hospital, waiting times, communication and treating patients with respect and dignity.

As part of the Next Stage Review in 2010, Lord Darzi identified patient experience as one of the three key elements of a high quality NHS service, alongside clinical effectiveness (making people better) and patient safety. He went further than this though, by saying that patient experience can only be properly understood by asking patients themselves what they think of the care that they receive.

Patient feedback enables us to check that we are providing a high quality service, to identify the things we do well and the things we need to improve as always, through the eyes of our patients, their families and carers.

“If we don’t get the patient experience right, then we are not delivering high quality care”

Why is patient experience important?

Firstly and most obviously we want to deliver the highest quality service that we can and patient experience is a key part of this. If we don’t get the patient experience right, then we are not delivering high quality care.

It goes deeper than this though, because listening and responding to patient feedback about the care we provide is a vital source of quality assurance.

As an extreme example, in 2013 the Francis Review of care failings at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust found that patients and their representatives had been telling the hospital for a number of years that there were serious failings in care, but these warnings were not heeded.

It is now recognised that NHS services need to routinely capture patient feedback and use this to ensure a high quality service is being provided and to identify areas for improvement.



How can we understand patient experience?

In short: by asking patients, their family and carers about their experiences of our services.

This can be done in a number of ways from simply talking to people informally, to more structured approaches such as comment cards, surveys and focus groups.

Many staff choose to undertake these sort of activities for their services, but we also have a Patient Experience and Involvement Team whose role it is to ensure that the Trust has processes in place to gather and respond to feedback about our services.

Each quarter the Trust Board (through the Quality and Performance Committee) receives data from our various surveys, PALS contacts and complaints. During the public session of each Trust Board meeting a patient or carer will give the story of their experience of care in our Trust. If patient ratings of care start to slip or complaints increase, then this is highlighted to the Board through our Quality and Performance Committee along with a plan describing how the service will address any shortcomings identified.

Patient feedback is shared widely throughout the Trust, so that our staff understand and can respond to it. Survey data is also displayed publicly on our website for patients and visitors to see. If you would like to know more about our patient experience feedback contact the Patient Experience Improvement Team Ext 5733.

Corporate patient experience processes include:

- Recording and dealing with complaints. Complaints are an important source of patient feedback and the issues raised in this way often relate to patient experience. For example, the most common complaints revolve around a lack of effective communication by staff
- Encouraging our patients to complete comments cards and participate in the Friends and Family Test during their visit or stay. We also send trained volunteers out to wards to talk to patients while they are in our care to gather their view
- Measuring patient experience across the whole Trust with a programme of postal surveys which we use to get an accurate picture, right down to a ward-level
- Participating in national patient surveys which tell us how we are doing compared to other Trusts
- Forwarding patient reviews about our Trust, posted on the NHS Choices website, to the relevant member of staff to see and respond to
- Holding regular events that patients, their families and carers can attend to tell us about their experiences of our services and can help us to make these better where needed



What do patients tell us about our Trust?

On the whole, patients are very complimentary about the care they receive at our hospitals. Around 98% of patients say that their care was 'excellent', 'very good', or 'good'.

We tend to perform in line with, or better than, other NHS Trusts in the national patient survey programme and Friends and Family Test. However, these overarching satisfaction levels can often mask specific underlying issues. For example, the glowing praise we receive often comes with some suggestions about how the patient's experience could have been even better. This constructive criticism often relates to a single incident of poor communication or staff behaviour that stuck with the patient, despite other aspects of their care being very good.

Even though we perform in line with the national average, some of our survey scores are also quite low in themselves – including ensuring patients are told about potential medication side effects, waiting times in clinic, and asking patients about their experience of care in our hospitals. All of our divisions are committed to improving these issues and a number of improvement projects are underway in this respect.

There is no doubt that patient experience is now a key priority for the NHS – particularly in terms of using patient feedback to assess and improve service quality. Within our Trust we already had a comprehensive programme of patient feedback mechanisms, which feed directly in to the way the Trust works. We can do more though – we need to get better at improving survey scores where issues are identified, and we need to ensure that staff in all areas of the Trust can easily access and use the wealth of feedback that we collect.

We also need to ensure that in addition to using patient feedback to monitor services we also engage patients and the public in resolving issues. Users of services are likely, if not more likely to have suggestions about how to address poor patient experience.



i For more information:

- If you would like to know more about our patient experience feedback contact the Patient Experience Improvement Team Ext 5733.
- Read [Outline magazine](#) via the intranet, where there are regular features about patient feedback
- Join us on social media [@gloshospitals](#)