

# Understanding how front-line staff use patient experience data for service improvement: an exploratory case study evaluation

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**Declared competing interests of authors:** Louise Locock declares personal fees from The Point of Care Foundation (London, UK) outside the submitted work, and membership of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Services and Delivery Research (HSDR) Funding Board. Jennifer Bostock declares membership of the NIHR HSDR Funding Board. Chris Graham declares a conflict of interest in financial activities outside the submitted work (he is employed by the Picker Institute). Neil Churchill declares a conflict of interest in financial activities outside the submitted work (he is employed by NHS England). John Powell is chairperson of the NIHR Health Technology Assessment (HTA) and Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) Editorial Board and Editor-in-Chief of HTA and EME journals. He is the principal investigator on another NIHR HSDR programme-funded project that was funded under the same call [HSDR 14/04/48: Improving NHS Quality Using Internet Ratings and Experiences (INQUIRE)]. Sue Ziebland declares a conflict of interest in financial activities outside the submitted work (Programme Director of NIHR Research for Patient Benefit). She is the co-investigator on another NIHR HSDR programme-funded project that was funded under the same call (HSDR 14/04/48: INQUIRE).

**Disclaimer:** This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published March 2020

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr08130

## Plain English summary

### Front-line staff use of patient experience data

Health Services and Delivery Research 2020; Vol. 8: No. 13

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr08130

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# Plain English summary

## Background and aim

The NHS collects a large number of data on patient experience, particularly through the national patient survey programme, but there are concerns that it does not use this information to improve care. This study explored whether or not, and how, front-line staff use patient experience data for improving quality of care.

## Methods

We encouraged and observed quality improvement projects in six hospital medical wards, talked to staff involved and carried out a before-and-after survey of patient experience. We included sites across England with varied experience of patient-centred quality improvement so that we could explore how projects worked in different contexts.

## Key findings

In every site, staff undertook quality improvement projects using a range of data sources. The number and scale of these varied, as did the extent to which they drew directly on patient experience data, and the degree of involvement from patients.

The ward-specific surveys conducted in each site were well received as timely and relevant. Patient stories, informal comments, and the daily ward experiences of staff, patients and family also fed into staff's improvement plans. These less formal types of information are sometimes not recognised as patient experience 'data'. They can be valuable for quality improvement, but it is not always obvious to front-line staff how to use them.

Staff may have good ideas but limited power to put them into practice. Progress was generally greater when there was support from a central patient experience/quality improvement function, and when the ward team comprised a range of professionals able to access help and resources. Staff motivation and engagement are essential but neglected; in some cases, staff used the project as a vehicle to gain greater recognition for their regular work. Some ward teams focused on improving staff experience as an indirect way to improve patient experience, describing this as 'happier staff means happier patients'.

An online guide for NHS staff, based on our findings, was produced in collaboration with The Point of Care Foundation.



# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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## This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 14/156/06. The contractual start date was in November 2015. The final report began editorial review in May 2018 and was accepted for publication in November 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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