

Collecting data on patient experience is not enough: they must be used to improve care

The NHS has been collecting data on patients' experience of care for over 10 years but the information is often ignored.

bmj.com today, Angela Coulter, Associate Professor at Oxford University and colleagues argue that this is "unethical" and call for a coordinated approach to use the information to help improve services.

Their views follow recent news of hospital trusts "helping" patients to write favourable reports of their experience of their services – and a report by Healthwatch England warning that the complaints system for the NHS in England is "hopelessly complicated" and needs an overhaul.

By April 2015, all NHS patients attending any type of healthcare facility in England will be invited to report back on their experiences. However, less effort has gone into how to understand and use the data, and there is little evidence that the information has led to improvements in the quality of healthcare, argue Angela Coulter at the University of Oxford and colleagues.

They describe the abundance of data collected over more than 10 years through surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups and Trip Advisor-style websites, but argue that "clinicians often ignore survey evidence" and that "only a minority of hospital providers have been galvanized into taking effective action."

"It seems that measurement is necessary but that change will not happen without effective leadership improvements," they write.

They point out that patients who report good healthcare experiences tend to respond better to treatment and believe that a more coordinated approach is needed "if we are to make better use of people's reports on their experiences."

They suggest a national institute of patient (or service user) experience should be set up "to draw the data together, determine how to interpret the results, and put them into practice."

They conclude: "Careful observation, measurement, recording, interpretation, and analysis of patients' subjective experiences is

essential to appreciate what is working well in healthcare, what needs to change, and how to go about making improvements.

We believe a more concerted attempt is now required to make use of the evidence. An institutional focus could prove to be the key to getting it taken more seriously.”

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