NHS needs to act on patient feedback, say health researchers

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Researchers from the University of Sheffield School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR) are today making a series of recommendations for NHS mental health trusts to change the way they collect and use patient feedback to improve the quality of care for inpatients. Credit: The University of Sheffield

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recommendations for NHS mental health trusts to change the way they collect and use patient feedback to improve the quality of care for inpatients.

As part of the study, staff and patients were interviewed across NHS mental health trusts in England, and it was found that few are collecting patient feedback to actively improve services.

Of those trusts that do, only a quarter were putting their feedback to good use but still mainly used it to create environmental change, rather than change to services.

The collaborative study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), and a team from the Universities of Sheffield, Warwick, Birmingham and Queen Mary University in London, together with the Mental Health Foundation have today published a new policy briefing into its findings.

'Evaluating the Use of Patient Experience Data to Improve the Quality of Inpatient Mental Health Care' (EURIPIDES) found that service improvements should never be led by complaints alone; but by listening to what works well for patients, NHS trusts have a real opportunity to empower both staff and patients.

Dr. Elizabeth Taylor Buck, a Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield, said: "NHS trusts are required to collect patient feedback, but there was little evidence about what they should be asking their patients, or how they collect and use it."

A key finding that could change the way NHS mental health trusts collect patient experience data was that patients staying on mental health wards are never too ill to give feedback, but prefer to do so towards the end of a hospital stay to clinicians they know and trust.

Even so, it was found that it was also important that those clinicians not only provided the opportunity for an ongoing dialogue about a patient's care during their stay, but for their relatives, carers or guardians to be able to feedback without the fear of negative repercussions for the patient.

"To create meaningful change and ensure patient voices are heard, NHS staff need to be given the right skills and supported to create time to collect appropriate feedback in the right way," said Dr. Taylor Buck.

"NHS staff should be encouraged to engage in the feedback process and be given timely access to patient experience data; not only so they can react quickly to complaints, but also to learn what they are doing well for patients and empower them to improve care action plans."

The briefing has been published ahead of the full study, which makes 18 key practice recommendations for how NHS mental health trusts collect and use patient feedback.

Scott Weich, Professor of Mental Health at the University of Sheffield and chief investigator of the study, said: "Our policy briefing published today highlights the key findings and our guidance for NHS mental health trusts in how they can make best use of their valuable patient experience data.

"We have engaged NHS stakeholders at every step of the study to ensure our findings were practicable, so today we are calling on organisations like NHS England, the Department of Health and Care Quality Commission to support the NHS providers to implement the upcoming recommendations and drive service improvements centred around patient needs.

"There will be resource implications for adopting effective models to

drive service improvements, but when used alongside patient outcomes and safety data to drive change, this leads to fewer patient safety incidents, better outcomes for patients and staff feeling more empowered to improve services."

Dr. Taylor Buck added: "The take-home message of this study is that no one is too ill to provide feedback on their care and that clinicians that build trusted relationships with their patients have the opportunity to provide quality care where patients feel they are being listened to."

Provided by University of Sheffield