

### Feedback from patients/clients

Seeking the views of patients and clients about the care provided to them is an important part of any effort to improve the quality of healthcare. Complementing the information gained from clinical audit, patient/client feedback has three interconnected functions — each with the potential need to make changes in practice:

- To address specific comments or complaints and implement changes where necessary

### Case study

Alf died very recently. He died in a pair of hospital pyjamas, far too big for him and with the stains of food someone else had spilt on them still showing, despite the efforts of the hospital laundry. It wasn't that Alf did not have pyjamas of his own. He had half-a-dozen pairs, all clean and ready to use when he had his fall. His daughter brought them all into hospital with him, but the nurse admitting him said:

'Oh, don't leave them, it's easier if we use the hospital ones. Patients' pyjamas get lost and it causes no end of trouble.'

So Alf's daughter took his own pyjamas away. For the first 24 hours Alf was quite alert, but he became more and more confused and gradually slipped into unconsciousness. Three days later he died. Two months after, his daughter is still upset at the memory of Alf, initially sitting up in a strange place in clothes that did not belong to him, which had made him wonder not only where, but also who, he was. She supposes people will think it silly, but in a way she feels even worse about the fact that he actually died in strange clothes, stripped of his personal identity.

### activity

Brighton Health Care Trust has a patient's advocate, functioning independently from the formal complaints procedures of the trust. The advocate helps patients address any difficulties they have experienced, and deals with hundreds of individual cases each year. Her work not only gives independent support to patients and their families, but also provides valuable feedback to the hospital's management.

Consider the potential advantages of giving patients/clients access to independent advice when they experience difficulties with the service they receive. Does such a mechanism exist for your organisation?

- To establish overall satisfaction with a service
- To find how a service can be refined and developed in order to better meet patient/client needs and preferences.

### Patient complaints

Patients/clients and their relatives may not always complain about poor quality care. Reasons for not complaining include:

- Hurt or shock at the lack of quality
- Fear of bureaucracy
- A wish to forget unpleasantness
- Not knowing to whom to complain
- Not having the written or verbal skills to make a formal complaint
- Fear of having to suffer as a result, either because they are still receiving care

### activity

Think of an occasion when you suspected that a patient/client or their family were dissatisfied with the quality of care provided. Was a complaint made? If not, why do you think this might be the case?

Find out, if you do not know already, the procedures in your organisation for handling complaints from patients/clients. Can you find out what the most frequent cause of complaint has been during the past year?

### activity

Are surveys of patients/clients undertaken in your area of work? Obtain an example of such a survey (or one from another department or organisation), as well as the evaluation of its results. Look at the type of questions asked and consider what the results tell you. What changes do you think might be made as a result of the survey? Try to find out if any changes were made, and what impact this had.

or because they may have to receive care in the future

- Not wishing to seem ungrateful. You cannot assume that all is well simply because you do not receive any complaints. If you do receive complaints, there is the additional problem that you may rationalise them by consoling yourself that

### activity

Going back to your work on the Activity at the bottom right-hand side of page 129, try to design a survey to find out to what extent patients/clients are satisfied with the service they have received. You might find it useful to undertake this activity with colleagues, so that you can agree the key issues that need to be included.

### Example: Patient satisfaction survey

The following questions were part of a patient satisfaction survey conducted in two GP practices in Essex:

- Are the premises clean and tidy?
- Are you satisfied with the facilities available?
- If you are disabled, do you have a problem with access?
- Is your general health discussed with you most times you visit?
- Do you usually see the same doctor each time you go?
- Do you feel pressured to see another doctor instead of your own?
- Do you leave the consulting room feeling confused?
- Are your ideas about the practice welcomed?
- Are you satisfied with the time you spend with the nurse?
- Are the words and explanations used easy to understand?
- Are you cared about as a person?

<http://www.equip.ac.uk/issue14/patient.htm>

