NHS Rotherham continen service

Patient Opinion case study

NHS Rotherham is using Patient Opinion to assess recent changes to its continen service.

We asked Helen Wyatt how it was going.

What is your role at NHS Rotherham?

I am patient and public engagement manager. My team’s job is to gather patient and public views to make sure we are responsive to health needs and drive improvements in health care in Rotherham.

We’re only a small team but we carry out a variety of activities, organise events, support patient and public meetings and run focus groups so we can gain views from a diverse range of people. We use different methods for gathering information, including handheld electronic surveys.

How you have used Patient Opinion locally?

We are trying hard to ensure that the information we gather is used at both operational and strategic levels to help us improve patient services. For us this is vital – it’s no good having surveys and number crunching data if you don’t do anything with it. Listening to patients helps us gain insight into the things that matter.

The continen service really wanted to adopt these principles and as it’s a sensitive area, it was vital that we listen to service users to find out exactly what they want from the service.

Why the continen service?

There had been a number of changes in the continen service. The managers and commissioners wanted to know how it was working, and if they had got it right.

The need for engagement work was identified at a meeting between clinicians, commissioner and the engagement team. We suggested various methods that could be used. Patient Opinion was “seized on” as the one they wanted to go with.
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How did you involve frontline staff?
It was a really simple process. We had a number of feedback packs already paid for at Patient Opinion. We had an initial meeting with staff in the continence service and identified key contacts to be briefed by Patient Opinion. After that the staff contacted patients and sent out the packs.

Was it a lot of work?
No. We were worried that responding would take a lot of time, but we quickly got into a routine of making a fast “thank you” response to positive comments. For anything that was more involved, or needed technical or service information, we worked on a draft via email.

And how have staff reacted?
Staff have found the system excellent – they are real fans! There have been a lot of really positive comments about the new service and the staff, and what is more interesting for me is that there have been a number of very thoughtful postings. We have had the chance, again working together, to respond to enquiries from patients, to signpost on to other services where needed, and to look at what we can do in the future.

So has there been an impact for patients?
There is starting to be. The feedback has helped us identify the need for a user group - and some potential recruits. Patients expressed concerns about how the service would work over bank holidays, and so a member of staff is setting up systems to ensure the service works well at these times.

Have you had any really critical postings?
Not really critical – a few people questioned why the service had changed. We had one very concerned posting, where the service user felt that continence products were being rationed and was worried, and perhaps a little angry, about this. Because of Patient Opinion we were able to enter into dialogue with the person, identify that he was at clinical risk, and offer additional visits to check on product use. He is now very happy with the service.

Any lessons for other people?
We set up a system where the responses would all come to one person (me) or my deputy, so that postings could be dealt with quickly, especially if critical.

In the continence service, I made sure I had several contacts in case I needed service specific information for a response at short notice. And the lead commissioner offered advice when needed.

As a result our responses have been well informed and I feel that this shows on the website. I would recommend this type of approach when targeting a specific service. In our case this ensured that responses could be quick, and also helped to make sure that we hit the right tone, and were friendly, reassuring and understandable.

So what next?
We have now started a much more through promotion of Patient Opinion, using the flyers and posters, within many other services.

Contact Helen at: helen.wyatt@rotherham.nhs.uk

www.patientopinion.org.uk
a free, confidential and independent website.

Or call us during working hours
0114 281 6256

Patient Opinion is a social enterprise run for the benefit of patients and staff.