Patient Journey Action Research
A collaborative and evidence-based approach to quality improvement in healthcare

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Project aims and objectives:
To improve health care, experiences, services and safety by giving a voice to and learning from patients, their care partners and multi-disciplinary staff.

Actions taken and methods used:
The Patient Journey improvement approach was developed in response to policy directives, patient experience data and reports by healthcare regulators. It is underpinned by the principles and philosophies of action research and patient-centred, humanised care.

Prior to launch of this independent PJ in an acute NHS hospital Trust in southern England, ethical and research & development approval was gained and support of the Trust Executive Board and management team secured.

Methods include action research, qualitative interviews, stakeholder sampling; process mapping; PJ project team meetings; thematic data analysis; evaluation questionnaires.

Who was involved?
Researcher: as ‘outsider’ PJ improvement project facilitator working in collaboration with team
Service providers: 25 core member multi-disciplinary Vascular Patient Journey Project Team comprising 25 core members (clinical, non-clinical healthcare staff and NHS management)
Service users: 11 patients and 6 care partners (husbands, wives, son, partner)

The Patient Journey Action Research (PJAR) improvement process:

Step 1
• Identify service for review/recruit multi-disciplinary team/identify patient group
• Define and agree project goals

Step 2
• Project team (stakeholder/matrix) sampling
• Mapping current Patient Journey

Step 3
• Recruit patient participants
• Qualitative interviews (by outsider to the team)

Step 4
• Data reports for project team
• Issues and Solutions’ working document

Step 5
• Issues for action prioritised, assigned & owned
• Timescales set and agreed by team

Step 6
• Review of actions taken
• Future planning aiming for sustainable continuous quality improvement

Continuous improvement

Measures:
• Monitoring via a PJAR Steering Group; NHS Exec. Committee/Trust Board; NHS and BU Ethics and R&D Governance Committees
• Audit trail of improvement e.g. via PJAR meeting notes; Issues & solutions change document

Outcomes:
• 75 issues identified from point of GP referral to post-discharge: 34 by patients, 35 staff & 6 jointly
• Data provided poignant catalysts for timely, appropriate, effective change and improvement.
• PJAR methodology established as an adaptable, fair and collaborative approach to evidence-based improvement

Lessons learned—views of participants:

Male Patient: “I felt I was able to give a very good account of my experiences instead of just knocking the NHS all the time. Was able to give praise where it was due.”

Female patient: “You could talk to a person rather than putting thoughts down on paper and hoping they would understand them.”

Physiotherapist: “Informal nature of meetings allowed frank and honest discussion. No element of blame, etc., whenever an issue,

Consultant Anaesthetist: “...this is a very good process that we should be constantly doing – and it’s not just a process that we should be doing in the NHS”

Ward Sister: “A good model –helped everyone draw out the issues and bring them all together.”

Pharmacist “...improvement in efficiency of systems as a result of the multidisciplinary approach to systems analysis and capacity planning, using a model similar to FMEA (Failure mode and effects analysis)...”

Lead Consultant: “Reproducibility of this approach is very dependent on the investigator/researcher and their ability to project manage and to secure the engagement of the team...”

Trust Management: “…what that work did was start our thinking around what it is like from the patient perspective and if you do that the efficiencies still come. There were great examples...of truly understanding the pathway and making it more patient focused but also safer and more efficient. It is also about the cultural shift across the hospital...by clinical teams leading the work with facilitation as you did gets great staff engagement and satisfaction in the work.”