

IMPROVING PATIENTS' EXPERIENCE

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

IMPROVING INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

With over 14 million patients attending A&E departments across England every year and patients ranging from those who have suddenly become ill or have suffered major injuries to those with less serious health problems, providing emergency care is both demanding and unpredictable.

Emergency care in the NHS is experiencing major changes, a ten year strategy - *Reforming Emergency Care* (2001) has been designed to ensure that patients will experience shorter waits for services whilst having greater involvement and choice. As a result of this strategy a lot of good work is currently underway to reduce waiting times and to make services meet patients' needs. The 2003 national survey of emergency department patients has identified a number of issues surrounding information and communication where patients have reported room for improvement.

Arriving at the Emergency Department

The hospital environment can be a confusing one so clear signage is important. It will enable patients to find their way to the emergency department quickly and easily and will help to direct them appropriately when they arrive. Knowing whether to first go to triage or reception may not be immediately obvious and using the term 'triage' may cause confusion (see *Bradford Case Study overleaf*).

There has been a huge drive to reduce waiting times in the emergency department. Most (93%) of the patients surveyed were seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner within 4 hours of their arrival but over half of the respondents were

not told how long they would have to wait to be seen. Updating patients with details of waiting times via an information screen or regular announcements to the waiting area could help to overcome this issue. Explaining the reasons behind any delays and providing useful information about the department and priority system could also help to keep patients informed (See *Dudley Case Study overleaf*).

Seeing a Doctor or Nurse

Problems with communication coupled with a lack of information about what is happening can make the emergency department experience a stressful one for patients. Nearly all patients reported that doctors or nurses had, to some extent, listened to all that they had to say. However, more than a third of patients definitely felt that they did not have enough time to discuss their medical problem with the doctor or nurse. Of those patients with anxieties and fears, over half felt that they had not been able to completely discuss their concerns with a member of staff and 1 in 6 patients felt that staff had, to some extent, talked in front of them as if they weren't there.

Tests & Treatment

Just over half of the patients questioned underwent tests (such as x-rays, ultrasounds or scans) during their emergency department visit but many patients were not aware why they had tests or what the results might mean. 9% of the patients surveyed felt their results were not explained in an understandable way and 3% of them never actually received the results of their tests.

Patients welcome an explanation from clinical staff about their care in a manner



Dr Ash Khan, Clinical Assistant at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust discusses the emergency department waiting area at a stakeholder meeting.

they can understand. 15% of patients felt they were not given enough information about their condition and treatment and 9% were given no information at all. Providing jargon free written material can help to answer many questions that patients may have. Giving information in person will help reinforce this as well as providing reassurance.

Leaving the Emergency Department

Patients and their carers should be given information about their medication as well as details of when to resume normal activities and possible danger signals to be aware of. Almost three quarters of patients were discharged at the end of their visit but many of them felt they were not given enough advice to help them recover at home. Half of those who needed information about side effects of their newly prescribed medication did not get it, a third of patients who needed information on danger signals regarding their condition and treatment were not told what to look for when they got home and 13% of patients were not told who to contact if they became worried about their condition when they left the hospital.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Acute Trusts: Emergency Department Patient Survey Results 2003

<http://www.chi.nhs.uk/eng/surveys/nps2003/emergency.shtml>

Improving Patients Experience in Accident & Emergency Departments:

www.doh.gov.uk/emergencycare/improvingpatient.pdf

Emergency Services Collaborative:

www.modern.nhs.uk/emergency

Department of Health-Reforming Emergency Care:

www.doh.gov.uk/emergencycare/index.htm

Emergency Care Lead Toolkit- A&E, National Electronic Library for Health

www.nelh-ec.warwick.ac.uk/ECL_Toolkit/a_e.html

Audit Commission Toolkit on the A&E environment:

ww2.auditcommission.gov.uk/itc/doc/aemantool4.doc

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR SURVEY RESULTS?

Weston Area Health NHS Trust have displayed national benchmark charts illustrating their survey results in their Emergency and Outpatient departments for all staff to see. There has also been analysis of the patient comments and each response has been assessed under the headings of staff attitude; waiting/access; environment; information/communication; quality of care and other. This has allowed the departments to focus on specific areas such as staff attitude, information and communication. They have also included the patient comments in a recent poster campaign, using the patient's thoughts on waiting in the Emergency Department. The poster's aim is to highlight to ward staff the target to reduce the waiting time in the Emergency Department and their part in the cycle of timely discharge of patients from acute beds.

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SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

Please send any examples of good practice within your Trust to:

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WHERE IT'S WORKING

Improving the experience of patients using the Emergency Department Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust has been actively using survey results and other patient feedback to improve the Emergency Department experience for their patients. A steering group of patients and key staff was formed to discuss some of the main issues raised, many of which were centred around information and the environment. The group has also suggested ways of implementing service improvements. A number of initiatives have been put into practice or are planned for the future, these include:

- Staff piloting a multilingual phrasebook to assist with patient communication
- Shift Leaders (Nurse in Charge) in the Emergency Department making personal announcements to patients in the waiting area regarding current waiting times. These announcements will be made at least every two hours and the leader concerned will then be available to discuss any necessary issues with patients and offer advice and alternatives to any problems they may be facing.
- Removing the Triage sign and renaming the area 'Patient Assessment' to help avoid any confusion for patients. Extra directional signs have also been ordered to help patients find their way to the Emergency Department more easily.
- The Lead A&E Clinician is working with the lead clinicians in surgery & orthopaedics to enable patients who are returning to the trust with a problem to be able to bypass A&E and to have direct access to their specialty.
- In order to make the department more welcoming for patients there are plans to change the lighting, seating and general organisation of the waiting area.
- The Trust are continuing to listen to the views of patients and staff, a box for comment cards is provided in the patient waiting area and medical staff have also been invited to provide their comments.
- Comments from the Patient survey are displayed in the staff area so all those working in A&E have access to them.

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Addressing the information and communication needs of Emergency Department patients

The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust

The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust has been working on a number of initiatives which are designed to improve the experience of Emergency Department patients. In autumn 2003 they set up a group of key stakeholders to focus on patient priorities and to look at ways of improving the service.

The group is made up of patients and staff from across the organisation as well as representatives from key partner organisations. Meeting on a regular basis they have used their national survey results and patient feedback from a number of other sources to come up with some recommendations for service improvements. Their plans include:

- Setting up a 'Helpdesk' within the Emergency Department. Trained volunteers will answer questions and deal with queries to help resolve some of the concerns that patients or their relatives may have. The volunteers working on the helpdesk will liaise with staff in the Department so they are able to give up-to-date accurate information.
- Producing a leaflet on how the Emergency Department works. This leaflet will inform patients how they are prioritised for examination and treatment as well as describing the patient's journey through the department. It is hoped that this will help patients understand where they are in the process. Three different leaflets are currently being piloted with patient groups.
- Providing an information board in the waiting area. This will explain the current situation in the department and also provide estimated times of how long patients might expect to wait to be seen.
- Providing a Customer Care Awareness training package which is specifically for staff and volunteers working in the Emergency Department. Staff will be involved in designing this training.
- Producing a short video explaining how the hospital and Emergency Department works. This will run intermittently on a TV set up in the waiting area.

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Please distribute this newsletter throughout your organisation.