

Proposals for a survey of PCT patients

Purpose of this paper

This paper provides an outline of the content of a forthcoming survey of PCT patients. The survey will need to be undertaken in spring 2003, so that the results can inform the 2003 performance ratings.

If you would like to comment on these proposals for the survey, please could you respond by 6 January 2003 so that your comments can be taken into account in on-going development work.

Background

Obtaining feedback from patients and taking account of their views and priorities is vital for bringing about improvements in the quality of care, and placing the patient at the centre of health services.

A national survey of general practice was undertaken in 1998, and repeated in 2002. These surveys did not address the wider functions of PCTs, and PCTs were not involved in conducting the surveys.

The proposed new survey will be the first survey to involve PCTs. The survey will address a wider range of PCT functions than the general practice focus of the earlier surveys. It will be part of a rolling programme of patient surveys in all NHS trusts which CHI is now managing. This year there will also be surveys of outpatients and emergency departments in acute trusts, and a survey of service users on CPA registers in mental health trusts and PCTs providing specialist mental health services.

Objectives of the surveys

The objectives of the surveys are to provide:

- feedback from service users which can be used by PCTs to identify areas for quality improvement;
- measures of the experience of service users, including performance indicators for use in the ratings process. It is intended that results of this survey will form part of the 2003 performance ratings for PCTs.

Content of surveys

Research about what matters to service users has been used to develop the questionnaire, and further testing of the questionnaire with users will take place. There will be a standard questionnaire for all PCTs: because of the tight timetable for carrying out the survey, it will unfortunately not be possible for PCTs to make local variations to the questionnaire.

The survey will ask about services from a range of primary care professionals including GPs, practice nurses, health visitors, district nurses and dentists.

The survey will cover the following topics:

- Prompt access
- Respect and dignity
- Information and education
- Involvement and choice
- Physical and emotional needs
- Coordination of care
- Environment and facilities
- Health promotion
- Involvement in health services

Sample, methods and timing

The survey will be postal, with at least two reminders. For each survey, a sample of at least 850 people over age 16 from each PCT will be drawn from the relevant patient registers. The aim will be to achieve 500 completed questionnaires per PCT: the recommended sample size may be larger in some PCTs to allow for list inflation and variations in expected response rates (based on experience of previous surveys).

We are currently assessing the options for drawing the sample, to identify the approach which will place the minimum burden on PCTs. We recognise that PCT registers are held on the Exeter system for the former Health Authority areas. We hope that a standard report can be developed which will produce the required sample of patients from the Exeter system.

The survey will be carried out in March-April 2003. We plan to provide trusts with the questionnaires and guidance for the survey by the beginning of February.

Conducting the survey

The questionnaire, survey methods and guidance are being developed by the NHS patient survey advice centre, at the Picker Institute Europe, on behalf of CHI.

It will be PCTs' responsibility to carry out the survey, or to contract for this to be done. The Department of Health have identified a list of approved suppliers for conducting patient surveys, and PCTs can contract with one of these organisations, without further tendering. The list of approved contractors, and their costs, is on the NHS survey advice centre website (www.nhssurveys.org). Given that the timetable for this year's survey will be tight, we recommend that you use one of the approved contractors for your survey, and that you identify which contractor you will use as soon as possible.

PCTs sharing the same Exeter system are advised to collaborate in undertaking the survey.

Results

We plan to:

- derive measures of performance for each aspect of patient experience.
- provide PCTs with national benchmarks, which will enable them to interpret their own results. This data will also inform CHI/CHAI's CGRs and inspections.
- produce a national report which will cover: the overall picture of patient experience of PCT services; analysis to identify variations, geographically, and for different patient groups.

Further information

You can feedback comments or clarifications via patient.survey@chi.nhs.uk.

Further information about the NHS survey programme can be found at www.nhssurveys.org, or from the NHS survey advice centre on 01865 208127.

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