Improving patient experience in primary care: a multimethod programme of research on the measurement and improvement of patient experience

Jenni Burt,1 John Campbell,2 Gary Abel,1,2 Ahmed Aboulghate,1 Faraz Ahmed,1 Anthea Asprey,2 Heather Barry,2 Julia Beckwith,1 John Benson,3 Olga Boiko,2 Pete Bower,4 Raff Calitri,2 Mary Carter,2 Antoinette Davey,2 Marc N Elliott,5 Natasha Elmore,1 Conor Farrington,1 Hena Wali Haque,1 William Henley,2 Val Lattimer,6 Nadia Llanwarne,1 Cathy Lloyd,7 Georgios Lyratzopoulos,1 Inocencio Maramba,2 Luke Mounce,2 Jenny Newbould,1 Charlotte Paddison,1 Richard Parker,3 Suzanne Richards,2 Martin Roberts,2 Claude Setodji,5 Jonathan Silverman,8 Fiona Warren,2 Ed Wilson,1 Christine Wright2 and Martin Roland1*

1Cambridge Centre for Health Services Research, Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, Cambridge, UK
2University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK
3Primary Care Unit, Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, Cambridge, UK
4National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Primary Care Research, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
5RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, USA
6School of Health Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK
7Faculty of Health & Social Care, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK
8University of Cambridge Medical School, Cambridge, UK

*Corresponding author mr108@medschl.cam.ac.uk

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

We aimed to gain a better understanding of how patients in general practice use surveys to record their experiences, to understand how staff respond to feedback and to find ways of engaging staff more actively in the process. We did this in a number of ways, including carrying out surveys, having discussions with patients and staff and trying out different ways of gathering patient feedback.

Patients were reluctant to be critical when completing questionnaires after consultations even when they did not think that their care had been very good and they explained their reasons for this. Considering the results of the national GP Patient Survey, we found that the most common reason for dissatisfaction was patients not being able to see a doctor of their choice, something that has got worse in the past few years.

We carried out several studies to understand why minority ethnic groups give low scores on patient surveys. Part of this is because they tend to be registered in practices with low scores. However, our studies also suggest that low scores from South Asian patients reflect poor care rather than, for example, different expectations.

We found that, in both primary and out-of-hours care settings, staff do not trust the results of patient surveys and do not usually make big changes in clinical care as a result of these. We looked for ways of engaging staff more actively with patient feedback. We tested ‘real-time feedback’ in which patients use a touch screen in the waiting room, with staff being provided with results fortnightly. Although patients found this useful, few actually used it unless they were reminded to do so by receptionists.

We describe the implications of our research for practice and make recommendations for future research.
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