Using online patient feedback to improve NHS services: the INQUIRE multimethod study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

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Background

People are increasingly able and willing to use the internet to give their views on products and services, and health care is no exception. This research aimed to find out what this online feedback from patients represents, how it is viewed by NHS staff and patients, and how it can be used by the NHS to improve the quality of its services.

Methods

We used a mixture of approaches. We talked to experts and examined previous research to find out about current practice in this area. We used a questionnaire to find out who the people who read and write online feedback are, and the reasons they choose to comment on health services in this way. We also interviewed patients about their experiences of giving feedback to the NHS. We used another questionnaire to find out the views and experiences of doctors and nurses. Finally, we spent time in four NHS trusts to learn more about the approaches that NHS organisations take to receiving and dealing with online feedback from patients.

Key findings

Many people use the internet to read feedback from other patients. Fewer people go online to write feedback, but when they do one of their main reasons is to give praise. Most online feedback is positive in its tone and people describe caring about the NHS and wanting to support it. They also want their feedback to form part of a conversation. However, many professionals are cautious about online patient feedback and rarely encourage it. NHS trusts do not monitor all feedback routes and staff are often unsure where the responsibility to respond lies. Maintaining patient confidentiality can be a challenge. It is important that NHS staff have the ability to respond, and can do so in a timely and visible way.
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This report

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