

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

John Powell,<sup>1\*</sup> Helen Atherton,<sup>2</sup>  
Veronika Williams,<sup>1</sup> Fadhila Mazanderani,<sup>3</sup>  
Farzana Dudhwala,<sup>1</sup> Steve Woolgar,<sup>4,5</sup>  
Anne-Marie Boylan,<sup>1</sup> Joanna Fleming,<sup>2</sup>  
Susan Kirkpatrick,<sup>1</sup> Angela Martin,<sup>1</sup>  
Michelle van Velthoven,<sup>6</sup> Anya de Jongh,<sup>7</sup>  
Douglas Findlay,<sup>7</sup> Louise Locock<sup>8</sup>  
and Sue Ziebland<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

<sup>2</sup>Unit of Academic Primary Care, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

<sup>3</sup>School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

<sup>4</sup>Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

<sup>5</sup>Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden

<sup>6</sup>Department of Paediatrics, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

<sup>7</sup>Lay representative, UK

<sup>8</sup>Health Services Research Unit, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK

\*Corresponding author [john.powell@phc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john.powell@phc.ox.ac.uk)

**Declared competing interests of authors:** John Powell declares current membership of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Technology Assessment and Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation Editorial Board (2005 to present), of which he is chairperson and editor-in-chief (since April 2019). In addition, John Powell is a co-investigator on another NIHR Health Services and Delivery Research (HSDR)-funded project, which was funded under the same call [Understanding how frontline staff use patient experience data for service improvement: an exploratory case study evaluation and national survey (HSDR 14/156/06)]. Louise Locock declares personal fees from the Point of Care Foundation (London, UK) outside the submitted work. In addition, Louise Locock is principal investigator on another NIHR HSDR-funded project, which was funded under the same call [Understanding how frontline staff use patient experience data for service improvement: an exploratory case study evaluation and national survey (HSDR 14/156/06)]. Sue Ziebland declares her work as programme director of the NIHR Research for Patient Benefit programme (2017 to present). Sue Ziebland is also a co-investigator on another NIHR HSDR-funded project, which was funded under the same call [Understanding how frontline staff use patient experience data for service improvement: an exploratory case study evaluation and national survey (HSDR 14/156/06)]. Sue Ziebland is a NIHR Senior Investigator. We acknowledge support from the NIHR Oxford Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust for salary support to John Powell, Anne-Marie Boylan and Michelle van Velthoven.

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

Published October 2019

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07380

## Plain English summary

### The INQUIRE multimethod study

Health Services and Delivery Research 2019; Vol. 7: No. 38

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07380

NIHR Journals Library [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

# Plain English summary

## 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.



# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) ([www.publicationethics.org/](http://www.publicationethics.org/)).

Editorial contact: [journals.library@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:journals.library@nihr.ac.uk)

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr). Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

## Criteria for inclusion in the *Health Services and Delivery Research* journal

Reports are published in *Health Services and Delivery Research* (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

## HS&DR programme

The HS&DR programme funds research to produce evidence to impact on the quality, accessibility and organisation of health and social care services. This includes evaluations of how the NHS and social care might improve delivery of services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website at <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/funding-programmes/health-services-and-delivery-research.htm>

## This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 14/04/48. The contractual start date was in November 2015. The final report began editorial review in October 2018 and was accepted for publication in June 2019. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

**© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2019. This work was produced by Powell *et al.* under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.**

Published by the NIHR Journals Library ([www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland ([www.prepress-projects.co.uk](http://www.prepress-projects.co.uk)).

## NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

**Professor Ken Stein** Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

## NIHR Journals Library Editors

**Professor John Powell** Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Editor-in-Chief of HTA and EME journals. Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK, and Senior Clinical Researcher, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, UK

**Professor Andrée Le May** Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals) and Editor-in-Chief of HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals

**Professor Matthias Beck** Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

**Dr Tessa Crilly** Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

**Dr Eugenia Cronin** Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

**Dr Peter Davidson** Consultant Advisor, Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

**Ms Tara Lamont** Director, NIHR Dissemination Centre, UK

**Dr Catriona McDaid** Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

**Professor William McGuire** Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

**Professor Geoffrey Meads** Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

**Professor John Norrie** Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

**Professor James Raftery** Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

**Dr Rob Riemsma** Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

**Professor Helen Roberts** Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, UK

**Professor Jonathan Ross** Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

**Professor Helen Snooks** Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

**Professor Ken Stein** Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

**Professor Jim Thornton** Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

**Professor Martin Underwood** Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors)

**Editorial contact:** [journals.library@nihr.ac.uk](mailto:journals.library@nihr.ac.uk)