Digital methods to enhance the usefulness of patient experience data in services for long-term conditions: the DEPEND mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

The DEPEND mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

Background

The NHS collects information about the experience of patients using its services (called 'feedback'), usually in written surveys. Staff do not always find this useful, as surveys may be very general. Patients sometimes write detailed comments, but staff find them hard to analyse.

We conducted a study to make feedback easier to collect and more useful to staff for improving services.

What did we do?

We studied patients with severe mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia) or musculoskeletal conditions (e.g. arthritis) in four sites: a large general hospital outpatient department, a mental health trust and two general practices.

We talked to patients and carers about their views and worked with them to design new ways to collect feedback. We talked to staff about how feedback could be most helpful for service improvement.

We used a computer science method called 'text mining' to summarise detailed patient comments more quickly.

We worked with patients, carers and staff to design new resources (a toolkit) to collect and present feedback.

We talked to patients, carers and staff to see if the toolkit made a difference.

What did we find?

We found a lack of understanding and experience of giving feedback. Participants (patients, carers and staff) wanted more meaningful and positive feedback. They also wanted feedback tools to suit the local context and to include informal feedback (e.g. conversations and thank you cards).

We found that text mining could be used to analyse detailed patient comments, although challenges exist.

The toolkit that was designed with participants included iPad (Apple Inc., Cupertino, CA, USA) kiosks to collect data, guides for patients and staff, text-mining programs and new ways of reporting feedback.

Staff were generally positive about the kiosks. Patients gave more mixed responses and the numbers providing feedback were small. Staff were positive about the feedback reports, but observations showed that no changes were implemented to services during our study.

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