A service-user digital intervention to collect real-time safety information on acute, adult mental health wards: the WardSonar mixed-methods study

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Published May 2024
DOI: 10.3310/UDBQ8402

Plain language summary

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2024; Vol. 12: No. 14
DOI: 10.3310/UDBQ8402

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain language summary

Mental health wards can feel unsafe. We know that patients and staff have different ideas about what makes a hospital ward safe or unsafe. Patients are often the first to know when the atmosphere on a ward becomes tense but, often, no one asks them for input or feedback at the time. We worked with service users and staff to develop new technology to make it easy for patients to tell staff about changes in the ward atmosphere. We put everyone's ideas together and some technical developers then built a digital safety tool to use on a tablet computer. Patients put in anonymous information about the ward atmosphere and staff can read it straight away. We tested it on six adult acute mental health wards for 10 weeks. We asked patients and staff what they thought about the tool and we looked at how it was being used. Patients and staff liked the look of the tool on the tablet computer. Some staff said they did not need it because they could tell how patients were feeling, but patients told us that staff did not talk with them much and did not always know when patients were feeling tense. Coronavirus disease 2019 made life difficult on the wards. Most ward managers said the tool could be helpful, but they had not had time to get used to it on the wards. Occasionally, the tablet computers were out of action. Many staff tried hard to use the tool. Most patient information was gathered when it was calm, perhaps because staff were not too busy to help them. We found that this tool could help staff know about tensions on the ward, but they need to get used to it and bring it into ward routines.

Health and Social Care Delivery Research

ISSN 2755-0079 (Online)

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

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

This journal was previously published as *Health Services and Delivery Research* (Volumes 1–9); ISSN 2050-4349 (print), ISSN 2050-4357 (online)

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This article

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HSDR programme or one of its preceding programmes as award number NIHR128070. The contractual start date was in January 2020. The draft manuscript began editorial review in February 2023 and was accepted for publication in August 2023. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HSDR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' manuscript and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this article.

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