I’ll tell you what I want, what I really really want


Remember the Spice Girls? They exploded into our lives in 1996 and became an instant global phenomenon with their debut single *Wannabe* and the iconic line “I’ll tell you what I want, what I really really want”.

More than 15 years later the band members have gone their separate ways but the sentiment of the song lives on. People today have a greater understanding of what they want and never more so than in health and social care. As patients increasingly exercise their right to choose where and how they receive their care, it becomes more important than ever for healthcare organisations to offer them what they want.

**Customer care**

But what do patients really want? Of course their clinical care has to be of the highest standard possible and, in the vast majority of cases, in both the NHS and the independent sector, it is. But patients today want more than that. The whole package of today’s healthcare has to be right. Patients are the customers and they want to be treated with dignity and respect, be involved in decisions about their care and looked after in a clean, safe environment.

Independent sector organisations are essentially commercial undertakings and, therefore, their success as a business is actively dependent on their reputation. We know that patients who exercise choice are quick to shun providers that they rate poorly and, for independent sector organisations, this can mean reduced referrals, termination of contracts and the potential to go out of business.

As a result, overall customer satisfaction is critical to the sector, and organisations have worked hard to ensure that it is not only their clinical care that is of the highest quality but that the additional criteria that patients use to judge their care is also outstanding.

**A positive partnership**

- The independent sector and the NHS have had a close relationship for many years. This has benefited patients and saved the NHS significant cost.
- Most people do not mind who provides their care as long as it is free at the point of use. But they do mind if the quality of all aspects of their care is not high.
- The ‘softer’ issues create the greatest dissatisfaction among patients and are critical in determining whether their experience is positive.
- The highest-rated organisations treat patients as customers and deliver the ‘extras’ that patients now expect.
- The NHS and the independent sector must cooperate, support and learn from each other to ensure patients receive the care they want.
Compliance rates

The Care Quality Commission’s (CQC) annual state of healthcare and adult social care in England report 2010/11 reported compliance rates for 11 of its 17 core quality outcomes. Of these, many relate to the ‘softer’ aspects of care, such as respect, dignity and cleanliness.

The results show that compliance rates for independent sector hospitals and clinics average 91 per cent compared with 72 per cent for NHS hospitals, and independent sector rates exceeded those of the NHS for every single outcome considered by the CQC.

I can’t get no satisfaction

Recent independent research from Dr Foster’s 2011 Hospital Guide included, for the first time, data on what patients think of individual hospitals, in both the independent and NHS sectors.2

Not only does this show that six of the top ten most recommended hospitals are in the independent sector, while none of the ten least recommended hospitals are independent, it also, perhaps more importantly, gives a very clear insight into what stops patients recommending a particular hospital.

An analysis of the most common complaints among patients who would not recommend a hospital shows that it is the ‘softer’ issues that create the greatest dissatisfaction. Analysis of the comments by Dr Foster supports this. The word most often mentioned, in both positive and negative comments, is “staff” and the quality of a patient’s interaction with staff is key to the difference between a good and a bad hospital experience.

The Dr Foster data is based, in part, on feedback on the NHS Choices website (250,000 responses) which also shows that nine of the top 20 rated NHS hospitals recommended by patients are run by the independent sector. There are no independent sector hospitals in the bottom 20.3

But what do patients know? Are they really able to judge what is and isn’t good care? Many would argue that healthcare delivery is complicated and patients are not well placed to comprehend the many factors involved in each patient case. However, independent evidence from Imperial College, London, suggests that their judgements are pretty much spot on. The research looks at 10,274 ratings of all NHS

Figure 1. Comparative reported compliance rates for 11 of the CQC’s core quality outcomes

‘Patients increasingly have access to a range of tools enabling them to make very public judgements about the care they receive. And the increase in choice means that their views matter.’

Acute hospital trusts in England from NHS Choices website (between 2009 and 2010) and found that the hospitals that patients rated the highest had the lowest death and readmission rates. And the hospital that patients found the cleanest had lower MRSA rates.4

Squeaky clean

We know that cleanliness matters to patients. Studies show that cleanliness, specifically hospital acquired infections, is the highest patient concern when faced with going into hospital and a fundamental factor in determining whether a patient is left with a positive or negative opinion of a hospital or treatment centre.

Of the top ten hospitals providing NHS care rated on cleanliness through NHS Choices3, nine are independent facilities. In clinical terms, latest figures for independent sector hospitals5 reported MRSA and C. difficile rates are respectively 0.39 and 3.71 per 100,000 bed days and discharges. Latest reported NHS figures6 are 3.7 per 100,000 for MRSA and 51.1 per 100,000 for C. difficile.

Even allowing for reporting differences, this clearly shows that for some categories of patient, the independent sector provides a lower risk environment than a busy, often less controllable NHS environment.

**Figure 2. What causes dissatisfaction?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was not involved in decisions about my care</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not treated with dignity and respect</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hospital staff did not work well together</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hospital was not clean</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was treated in mixed sex accommodation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dr Foster Hospital Guide 2001–2011.

The extra mile

Patients increasingly have access to a range of tools enabling them to make very public judgements about the care they receive. And the increase in choice means that their views matter. The highest-rated organisations will always be those that treat the patient as a customer and deliver the ‘extras’ that may in the past have been ignored.

The NHS and the independent sector both have strengths and weaknesses. As the pressures on healthcare systems increase to meet demands of an ageing population and economic constraints, it is more important than ever that both sectors are able to cooperate, support and learn from each other to enable patients to continue receiving the care that they want.

For more information on the issues covered in this briefing, contact catriona.richardson@nhsconfed.org

References

2. The 2011 Dr Foster Hospital Guide. www.drfosterhealth.co.uk
4. Greaves F et al. ‘Associations between web-based patient ratings and objective measures of hospital quality.’ Archives of Internal Medicine, 13 February 2012.
NHS Partners Network

NHS Partners Network (NHSPN) was established in 2005 and incorporated into the broader NHS Confederation in June 2007. The network represents a wide range of independent sector providers of NHS services, ranging through acute, diagnostic, primary and community care. Its members are drawn from both the ‘for profit’ and ‘not for profit’ sectors and include large international hospital groups and small, specialist providers. All members are committed to working in partnership with the NHS and to the values set out in the NHS Constitution.

For further details about the work of NHSPN, visit www.nhsconfed.org/nhspn or email NHSPartnersNetwork@nhsconfed.org