

Recording positive feedback can boost staff morale and help improve service quality

Using compliments to measure quality

In this article...

- Why it is important to collect positive feedback
- How a trust developed a system for gathering compliments
- How collating compliments can help measure improvement

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Collecting positive feedback can increase nurses' confidence, show improvements in performance and provide a baseline for measuring patient satisfaction. This article describes how nurses on a dementia assessment ward designed, implemented and evaluated a way of collecting compliments, changing staff attitudes to receiving feedback.

The Department of Health (2009a) has said the NHS should listen to complaints, and address them better. A study from the health service ombudsman said trusts needed to "listen harder" to complaints (Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2010).

The experiences of nurses, along with other healthcare staff, are important when listening to and learning from service users about their experiences of receiving care (DH, 2009a). The complaints system is, therefore, an important educational tool.

In 2009, the government introduced a single complaints system for health and adult social care services in England (DH, 2009b). The DH offered guidance for trusts on producing patient information leaflets on the four Cs – comment, concern, complaint or compliment. This said the four Cs should be an essential part of feedback, as an indicator of what is working, what is potentially problematic, how to prevent problems escalating and how to highlight

opportunities for staff improvement (DH, 2009a). It encouraged organisations to consider comments and compliments about staff and services together.

However, on reviewing leaflets from several trusts I found that only around 10% of a typical complaints leaflet referred to compliments. This shows that, while systems exist for making a complaint, there are none for recording compliments, yet patient and carer satisfaction is a key measure of patient experience. This article shows how a bottom-up, locally led innovation can help embed quality within a ward (DH, 2008a).

Background

In 2010, 2Gether Foundation Trust's complaints department set out to improve the collection, recording and reporting of compliments for 2010-11. Staff often receive compliments by letter or card, verbally or via a gift. They are thanked for treatment, care and support, or complimented on the environment, atmosphere, and cleanliness of the ward (McDonald, 2010).

However, not all compliments were being recorded and sent to the complaints department or the patient advice and liaison service. This meant the number of compliments listed in the trust's annual and quarterly reports was not accurate.

Willow ward is the only dementia assessment ward at Charlton Lane Hospital. It is important to capture feedback from people with dementia, but verbal and written compliments are often limited due to levels of understanding, communication problems and stage of illness (Allen, 2001).

In 2009, just 16 compliments were recorded for Willow ward, a monthly average of 1.33. Verbal compliments were frequent, but were not collected – the trust's system relied on written evidence. Therefore, the total number of compliments reported was inaccurate and did not reflect the service. Using the Productive Mental Health Ward (NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, 2008), staff trialled a way of collecting compliments.

The project

A compliments grid was created, based on categories in the 2009-10 complaints department annual report. This recorded the number of compliments, and how staff were thanked. These categories were put into a daily table; staff tick the appropriate box when they receive a compliment.

Initially, the compliments grid was to be displayed as a wall calendar to show a week at a glance. However, the team found it more useful to have a daily grid stapled into the ward diary where they would see it several times a day. This helped act as a prompt to record compliments.

Completing the grid takes seconds; staff tick two boxes for each compliment – one tick shows who made the compliment and what it was about, and the second tick shows the form of the compliment. The daily grid records several compliments a day, and the daily total. The compliments grid was trialled on Willow ward for one month in September 2010.

Evaluation

By the end of the month, the team had collected 30 compliments. This was a rise of more than 28 recorded compliments a month – almost double the tally for the whole of the previous year (Figs 1 and 2).

Carers made the most compliments, followed by other family members, then patients. Most compliments were verbal rather than written or in the form of a gift,

5 key points

1 A robust system for collecting compliments ensures positive feedback is accurate

2 Compliments can be offset against complaints to give a balanced view of a service

3 Data can be used to benchmark services and improve staff awareness of quality issues

4 Collecting compliments can give a ward positive exposure in an organisation

5 The method for collecting and recording compliments should be easy to use and sustain

Fig 1. Willow ward compliments September 2010 – source and topic

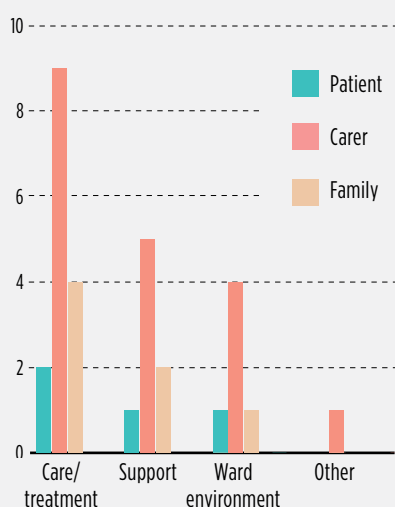
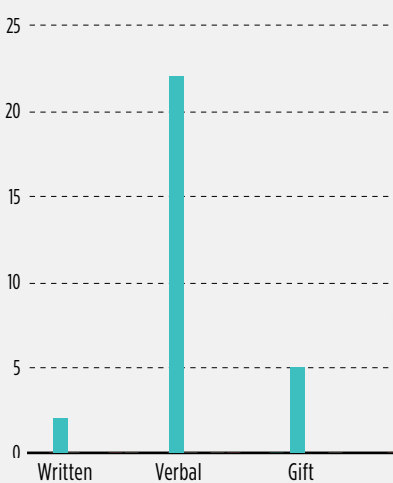


Fig 2. Willow ward compliments September 2010 – type



These graphs show the subject of compliments received, who made them and whether they were in form of writing, letters or gifts

BOX 1. BENEFITS OF COLLECTING COMPLIMENTS

Positive feedback:

- Reduces ward staff stress levels and increases confidence;
- Improves staff wellbeing;
- Improves teamworking toward shared goals;
- Increases motivation in the ward team to continue the initiative;
- Allows patient and carer satisfaction with ward staff and services to be measured;
- Offers a counterpoint to any complaints received.

and the greatest proportion were about care and treatment. No compliments were received during the study period.

Discussion

Willow ward's team goal was to collect compliments more accurately and measure something meaningful. Staff found the grid easy to use and sustain. The ward clerk prints off and staples one grid per day into the ward team diary. She then tallies up the total for each month and passes this to the ward manager who forwards the data to the complaints manager.

This small change towards improving quality has been locally led (DH, 2008b). Implementing Productive Mental Health Ward (NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, 2008) gave staff the confidence to challenge processes, and find a simple system that would work for them.

Collecting compliments can be used to measure progress, give a ward positive exposure and improve awareness of quality (DH, 2010). It is also without bias, as anyone giving a compliment is unaware it is being recorded. There is no pressure to make a compliment verbally, or for staff to ask a person to put it in writing.

Offsetting compliments against complaints laid the foundations for a stronger customer focus and helped develop a ward culture that learns from feedback.

Conclusion

Collecting compliments is one example of a ward-based innovation for measuring and tracking feedback. It can show improvements in performance, and provide a baseline for measuring patient satisfaction.



It also shows a ward team how generating meaningful data can help drive continuous improvement. It gives the team factual information to show whether they are achieving their goals, and has an impact by displaying this data visually.

The project helped the team to understand their performance in terms of providing care, treatment and support to patients and carers. It also helped them to positively recognise the impact of their

contribution to care in the ward and the trust. Two more wards have adopted the system, and the complaints department is considering introducing it trust wide. **NT**

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