

Quality Matters – our Response to the Francis Report

Alder Hey commits to a quality manifesto

Alder Hey is to launch its own Quality Manifesto, in order to publicise the Trust's commitment to patient safety and share the ground breaking work being done by staff to give patients the very best care and best experience possible.

This move is in line with the Government's drive for all trusts to publish their responses to the Francis Report, which challenges the NHS to care for patients in a safe, effective and compassionate way, learn lessons when things go wrong, and ensure proper accountability is in place.

One person who has experienced the Trust's focus on quality is the father of a patient, whose view on the Trust were recorded by staff and shared with the Board, leading to improvements being made for breastfeeding mothers within the hospital.

Baby Smith was transferred to Alder Hey after he fell ill hours after birth. He spent a week in the Intensive Care Unit and a few days in the High Dependency Unit before being taken on to the Neonatal Ward. Dad was keen to highlight how fantastic the staff had been in taking care of their son, describing them all as friendly, helpful and informative saying he 'really couldn't fault any of them'.

However, despite dad's high opinion of those involved in caring for his son, he and his wife didn't have as good an experience as it could have been. When they were moved to Neonatal, mum was trying to establish breastfeeding of her baby and they were disappointed with the facilities available. While her baby was recovering on the ward, his parents were staying in Ronald McDonald House and it obviously wasn't practical for mum to walk over to the hospital every hour during the night to breastfeed her baby. As there were no sleeping facilities for mum on the ward and there weren't breastfeeding pumps available, her baby instead had to be fed via a tube every three hours. Despite their baby's fantastic recovery following lifesaving care, being unable to breastfeed their baby properly was holding the family back from going home.

Fortunately, the staff on the ward with support from Liz Grady, Health Promotion Practitioner and the surgeon involved quickly managed to resolve the families concerns. A bed was moved into the baby's room enabling mum to continue breastfeeding throughout the night. Within two days, their baby was breastfeeding properly and they were able to go home (earlier than previously planned). Both mum and dad were pleased that the staff on the ward listened to and understood their concerns and at how quickly things were made better for them.

This story highlights how small things can make a massive difference to the experience of a family. These are the things that can help a baby recover quicker and return home sooner, while making a families time in hospital a little easier.

*The names in this article have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

The Impact of the Francis Report and its challenges

According to Deputy Director of Nursing, Hilda Gwilliams; “The Francis report challenged all of us to think about the idea of ‘clinical leadership’. Not just at Board or executive level, but everywhere. We all have a responsibility to our patients, whether we are cleaners or porters, doctors or nurses, managers or senior executives.

“All of this fits strongly with our own approach to quality and we already making huge progress. Leadership isn’t something you need to go on a course to learn, it’s something we do every day without realising, and a set of skills we need to identify and develop. The work we’re doing on quality means that we all have a job to do in improving the future.

“Our approach is not just about setting annual targets. It’s about us leading the world in children’s healthcare. We have a burning desire to push boundaries and see really fantastic improvement for patients. After all, every one of us wants our children and young people to have the very best possible experience at Alder Hey, and be given the safest, most effective care.”

Meanwhile, Alder Hey’s Medical Director, Ian Lewis has been at the forefront of the drive to make sure that the wellbeing of patients and their families remains firmly at the centre of national attention. As Co-Chair of the Children and Young People’s Forum, he provided a formal response to the Francis Report, which the Government included in its own recommendations.

He said; “I am really proud to fly the flag for Alder Hey at a national level. At the core of the Trust’s work is the dedication and commitment of our 2,700 staff. This is second to none and our reputation for quality care is one that we should all be proud of.”

The Francis Report at a glance

The Francis Report set out the lessons from a public enquiry, chaired by Robert Francis QC into failings at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust between January 2005 and March 2009.

The report made distressing reading, including stories of patients who were so thirsty they had to drink from flower vases and suffering without adequate pain relief. Worse still, it became clear that these were not isolated incidents but that the culture at Mid-Staffs had become so damaged that such occurrences had become normal practice.

Following this, NHS Medical Director Sir Bruce Keogh carried out a further inquiry into higher-than expected hospital death rates at 14 other NHS Trusts in England. Then, during the summer, Professor Don Berwick published a further report into patient safety.

Their identification of risk factors, plus recommendations to improve patient care and safety, mean there has been a huge focus on standards of hospital care by the media, politicians and the public. The Government has just published its own response to the Francis Inquiry, and what it expects of NHS Trusts, called *‘Hard Truths – the journey to putting patients first.’*

The Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, has said that with the drive, commitment and innovation of Trusts, he knows he will see real and lasting change as a result.

Key messages from the Francis Inquiry

1. This was a system failure as well as the failure of a particular Trust
2. No single recommendation should be regarded as the solution to the many concerns identified
3. A fundamental change in culture is required across the NHS
4. Every single member of staff needs to play their part in the change that needs to happen

The report makes 290 recommendations for improvements aimed at ensuring patients are treated with safety and compassion, and the Government has given its backing to the vast majority of them.

Constantly improving: Alder Hey's commitment to quality

"No one can ever doubt the commitment of Alder Hey staff to providing excellent patient care day in and day out" says Nursing Director Gill Core, "We need to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills, tools and resources to make sure they can deliver the highest standard at all times and that they work with safe systems that prevent things going wrong."

In the last two years much has changed in the Trust with regard to the management of quality and there is still much more to do in the coming years. The approach to quality improvement is based on two strategic documents, the Quality Strategy and the Patient Experience Strategy and a set of quality aims that have been developed with patients and their families and staff.

Alder Hey's quality aims are focused on working to achieve three main outcomes:

- Patients should not suffer harm in the Trust's care
- Patients should receive the most effective, evidence-based care
- Patients should have the best possible experience.

When signing up to the aims, the Trust board and senior management knew that there was a lot to do in order to achieve them. According to Chair, Sir David Henshaw they are very ambitious, but he believes they reflect the ambition of the Trust staff; "Alder Hey doesn't employ people who are happy to try and reduce safety incidents by 10% per annum. Our staff don't want *any* safety incidents and as such we need to work to help them to do that and to continue to be proud of the work they do"

Putting plans into action – Safety, effectiveness and experience

Compassion and care

Much has been written about Alder Hey's caring approach. Wards and departments are full of examples of care and compassion in practice. In order to ensure this is a consistent part of every single patient experience, staff need to feel supported and cared for too.

The Trust has seen a significant rise in admissions and in the dependency of the patients it treats. This means at times it is difficult to make sure that resources, particularly staff, are available in sufficient numbers with the right skills to keep up with the change in patient demand.

This year Alder Hey has invested heavily in nursing staff, doctors and other support staff, which isn't something that many Trusts can claim to have done in the financial recession.

There is a real need to do more to use information and intelligence to predict changes and be able to respond to them straight away. Meanwhile, the use of information in developing the quality improvement culture will be a focus of the next two years as the Trust improves its systems.

Openness and transparency

The Board is working hard to make sure its reports are more closely linked with the Trust's quality aims and to develop reports that are readily understood by all staff, as well as demonstrating the organisation's commitment to quality and how it is performing in delivery quality.

It has been challenging for staff to always be as open with families as they should be when things go wrong. Fear of blame or of legal claims has often interfered and left staff confused. The Trust is working to change this and make sure that staff feel confident and supported to be open and transparent, and this includes being able to raise concerns without fear.

Leadership

Strong clinical leadership is vital to delivering quality improvement and this year has seen the ranks of clinical directors and service group leads bolstered with new members. Together with other members of the senior management team they will drive the charge to deliver the quality aims, and will work with staff, patients and their families to ensure they are involved in changes and developments.

The clinical leaders also contribute to the quality walkabout programme which each month focusses on a CBU. In recent months this has been expanded to ensure that more departments are visited and more staff have the opportunity to demonstrate their good work and share concerns.

Gill Core is clear that the Trust has already made significant progress. She says; "We are moving forward in delivering our quality improvement culture, all of which sits comfortably with the recommendations in the Francis report and other key quality documents.

"We also recognise that quality improvement is a journey and while everyone in the Trust will have been part of one of the many quality improvement initiatives that we have been undertaking, it is probably fair to say that we haven't made sure that all staff know what they all are.

"In the coming year we will get much better at keeping staff informed and enabled to contribute and get involved. Look out for our regular "Quality Matters" updates that will be coming your way throughout 2014."