

Unit Four

Personal and professional development of health care assistants from a patient's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- explain how patients are involved in the development and assessment of health services
- show you how you can get involved in providing feedback on the services that you receive.

What is personal and professional development?

Personal and professional development is a system for NHS staff to use to make sure that they are up to date and that they are able to develop their role to suit the needs of their patients. A personal development plan (PDP) is where staff record their personal development goals and how they plan to meet them.

Patients and service users have high expectations of services provided in general practices. Patients want to know that the practice takes maintaining levels of knowledge and skills seriously. Reading about what training and education staff have undergone and knowing that they are demonstrating good levels of competence helps to give you as a patient more confidence in the advice and service that you receive. In addition how an HCA behaves when with a patient is important. It is not just about knowing what training and education has been received but seeing it put into action.

How can this be achieved?

Every member of staff including HCAs in a general practice are entitled to an annual personal development review with their line manager. This is where they are able to sit down and talk about:

- *What has gone well – this could be aspects of the job that they enjoy. New skills that they have learnt. Letters of thanks from patients*
- *Areas for improvement – this could be things that they have found hard. For example, they may have been asked to do things they did not feel competent to carry out. It could be that they needed some extra reassurance or training to feel more confident*
- *Specific skills and knowledge – this could include new skills the member of staff feels need developing, and how this can be obtained*
- *What they would like to achieve in the future – goals and ambitions for the coming year and future career opportunities.*

HCAs will have the opportunity to meet with their manager on a regular basis however, the annual review or appraisal is a special time that is set aside in a private room without any interruptions. It is an opportunity to highlight the positive aspects of someone's work rather than dwell on the negative. As a patient you have the opportunity to become involved with the practice to support them in developing their services and provide positive feedback for these reviews.

Sharing opinion

As an individual, there are a number of ways in which feedback can be given about the quality of service received.

- *Focus groups* – this is a way that Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) or general practices can evaluate services or test new ideas. Basically, they are interviews, but with 6-10 people at the same time in a group. They are a good way of getting lots of information and encouraging people to talk.
- *A patient panel* – these are set up to give patients, relatives and carers the chance to meet with practice staff and make a difference by sharing their views and experiences of the service received. For example a patient panel could discuss the impact of having an HCA at the practice and how it has made a difference to the practice.
- *Patient participation group* – this is another way you can work with the practice to share ideas and allows greater involvement not only in your own care but also the development of local and national health provision. www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/26740205/ or www.napp.org.uk has more information as to how you can be involved.
- *Individual patient opinion, via:*
 - verbal or written feedback
 - placing your suggestions in the practice 'suggestion box'
- *Practice surveys* – completing the annual patient survey informs the practice and the PCT about the level of service you receive, eg about waiting times, are there enough staff.

Patient and Public Involvement

Some Primary Care Trusts have a 'Patient and Public Involvement Forum' that allows patients to give opinions, comments and feedback to the practice and PCT.

There is a Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPI) for every NHS Trust and PCT in England. They are made up of local people who have an interest in health services within their local community. PPI Forums help to raise awareness of the needs and views of patients and the public and services available to them. For further information and details of how to contact your local PPI Forum go to www.cppih.org/

If patient involvement or a public consultation exercise is to be meaningful, it has to involve people who represent the section of the population that the exercise is about. People from minority groups or those with sensory impairments, such as blind or deaf people, need to be involved.

“

Patient and public involvement means individual involvement as a user, patient or carer, or public involvement that includes the processes of consultation and participation.¹

”

Patient and public involvement may occur at three levels:

1. *for individual patients about their own care*
2. *for patients and the public about the range and quality of health services on offer*
3. *for patients and the public to enable the appropriate planning and organisation of health service developments.*

Feedback might include detailing how the patient views the care provided by health care assistants (HCAs). This may result in the HCA informing the practice and patient as to the level of competence of the HCAs and their duties, and highlighting to the PCT the standards of education and training provided in the area.

You might write a thank you note when you have received good service, or a letter to the practice manager about good levels of care. Specify if you can, within the limits of keeping clinical information confidential, what care you received and at what level – was it excellent, satisfactory or could be better.

Example: Patient feedback to HCAs

One general practice reported that the DNA (Did Not Attend) rate was very high and they were concerned that patient care was being affected. When they employed an HCA one of their tasks was to speak to people in the waiting room to get to know them better. They tried to find out why people were not attending the clinics. Patients began to feel more comfortable talking about the service they received from the practice and their comments were noted by the HCAs. As the relationships developed between the HCA and the patients they began to attend the clinics and consultations more regularly. (GP, Staffordshire)

Example: Areas that patients may comment on:

- *Well trained staff who look after you in a professional manner and can explain clearly what they are doing or inadequately trained staff or staff with poor levels of competence, eg when taking a blood pressure, peak flow reading, or perhaps a blood-sugar reading.*
- *Maintaining confidentiality by taking you aside or into a separate room to discuss matters or lack of confidentiality, eg your personal or clinical details being given in front of other patients.*
- *Staff coping well in an emergency situation or staff not being trained in the management of emergency situations, eg when the person you were accompanying fainted.*
- *Fast and efficient service when attending for treatment or investigations or these being unavailable due to poor management of resources or services, eg not knowing how to find your results or the request for your investigations.*
- *Qualifications of staff are displayed either in the practice or practice leaflet and you can see clearly who is acting in what role, eg it is clear when a receptionist is acting in a different role as an HCA – if this is not the case you might suggest they wear a different uniform and the qualifications that people wearing uniforms have, are listed in the practice leaflet.*
- *Team members not acting on information received, eg you continue to receive reminders for your 'flu immunisation although you have told the nurse you have had it already.*

Any or all of this information could feed into the information collected by the HCA in his/her PDP. This information will be passed onto the practice employer or to the PCT as required. Alternatively, it might go directly to the practice manager to inform the practice on what is going well and what needs attention. At review time, this information can be used to inform the actions that need to be taken or, if a more serious deficiency is identified, prompt immediate review and the development of an action plan.

Appraisal and feedback to the public

The appraisal processes need to be quality assured for the primary care trust or practice to be able to demonstrate that they can protect the public from poor or under-performing staff. Such quality assurance will relate to the appraisers, their training and support, as well as systems to examine the quality of evidence in the documentation relating to an individual's performance and outcomes of their personal development plan. It should be available to the public in summary form and suitably anonymised.

These quality checks are undertaken through a process called clinical governance. This is defined as: The framework through which the NHS is accountable for the continuing improvement of quality of their services whilst still safeguarding high standards of care, thereby creating an environment which aims for clinical excellence. (www.nhstayside.scot.nhs.uk/FoISA/Glossary.htm)

The key principles of the government's quality control in primary care:

- *a coherent approach to quality improvement*
- *clear lines of accountability for clinical quality systems*
- *effective processes for identifying and managing risk, and addressing poor performance.*

Appraisal and continuing professional development are processes that practices and PCTs should be able to demonstrate that they have in place to ensure that problems are identified early, analysed and action taken to avoid any further repetition.² If you know that quality of care is being monitored in this way from information in the media and in practice information leaflets, you will have more confidence in the people delivering it. Summary reports to highlight excellence or satisfactory standards, as well as the actions being taken to remedy problems, should be also made available to patients and the public. This might be by a practice newsletter, notice board or web site and by specific feedback to suggestions, comments and complaints.

Summary

- *You should expect your practice to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that their staff, including HCAs, are properly supervised, trained and competent to carry out their role.*
- *Personal and professional development is a system for NHS staff to use to make sure that they are up to date and that they are able to develop their role to suit the needs of their patients.*
- *A PDP plan is where staff record their personal development goals and how they plan to meet them.*
- *Each member of staff has their PDP reviewed on a regular basis by their supervisor or mentor.*
- *PCTs and practices have a responsibility to make sure that patients and the public are involved in the assessment of NHS services.*
- *Patients can help practices by giving feedback to the practice on their experience of the care that they receive.*

References

1. Chambers R, Drinkwater C, Boath E. *Involving Patients and the Public*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press; 2003.
2. Wakley G, Chambers R. *Continuing Professional Development in Primary Care*. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press; 2000.