

Listening to service users to better understand your system

NHS Grampian's experience

March 2021

Engaging with service users can help services to understand current issues and in order to identify change opportunities. Read how NHS Grampian engaged with service users virtually to understand more about the care they received on the Urgent Suspected Care (USC) pathway.

Engaging with service users

A key part of the [improvement journey](#) is '**understanding your system**' in order to identify the current constraints in care delivery. This allows teams to **identify potential change opportunities which will enable the service to improve**. Service users can provide invaluable insights about the care they receive, what went well and any challenges they faced. This can also help increase understanding about what adds value to a service user's experience.

NHS Grampian dermatology and plastics services wanted to understand more about the care those service users on the Urgent Suspected Care (USC) pathway had received. Specifically they wished to understand:

- **service users pre-hospital and hospital care experiences**
- **how service users received news of their diagnosis, their treatment, and their results**
- **their care experience, and**
- **service users reflections on what went well, and what could be improved.**



A great solution to the impact of COVID-19

This work was originally planned prior to March 2020 as in-person interviews, however due to COVID-19 and a need for services to reduce face-to-face interaction (and minimise hospital footfall to prevent risk of infection), the team decided to change their plans to virtual delivery, utilising [NHS Near Me](#) appointment slots.



This would allow them to continue their improvement work at pace. For some recommendations from the team about virtual delivery of interviews, check out our [guide](#).



The initial plan was to meet with individuals when they came in for a clinic appointment. Grampian is a large geographical area and some patients may have to travel a fair distance to attend hospital in Aberdeen so we didn't want to bring them in on a different day. COVID came along and changed all of that and actually the use of [NHS] Near Me made it easier. We could do the three interviews on the same day.



Acute Transformation Programme Manager, NHS Grampian

What happened?

The interviews were **conducted jointly** by the Acute Transformation Programme Manager Laura Kluzniak, and Clinical Nurse Specialist Ashleigh Davidson.

Having both the **QI and clinical expertise in the room** helped them and the service users feel more comfortable. The service users discussed their care in detail, aware that Ashleigh had detailed knowledge of the service.

Laura and Ashleigh were able to ensure that questions vital to both **informing the improvement work** and **understanding key steps in treatment received** were asked.



Ashleigh is the clinical part and she had all that knowledge and expertise and it needed to come from her[...] I feel it is absolutely vital to have the right people doing it [...]made a really great team."

Acute Transformation Programme Manager, NHS Grampian

Conducting the interviews



Three service users who had received treatment over the past years were contacted by Ashleigh and agreed to be interviewed. The **service users completed consent forms ahead of the interviews** and had a **virtual introduction email** from Laura to ensure they felt comfortable and prepared for the interview. This also provided the opportunity for them to raise any concerns or issues.

One hour was allocated per interview and the NHS Near Me appointments were set up consecutively with short 'de-brief' breaks between each. This would allow Laura and Ashleigh to reflect on the responses they were hearing immediately and note down any other useful comments that could help their analysis. **The use of NHS Near Me also ensured project continuity and speed.**

There is no way these patients would have had appointments on the same day and it might have stretched over a month or six weeks

Ashleigh is the specialist nurse around that area of work and she's got existing relationships with these people and she identified them as approachable, willing, and knew what they had experienced.

Acute Transformation Programme Manager, NHS Grampian

Analysis and feeding back to the service



Following the interviews, Ashleigh and Laura combined their notes, anonymised the identities of the participants, and with administrative support, created an **easy to read, colour-coded response document** which showed all three responses to questions side-by-side.

This enabled the team to **quickly identify key themes across the responses**. For example, how photos on some of the waiting room posters had graphic images about cancer and made service users more anxious whilst awaiting their first appointment.

Key learning and recommendations

Whilst they were only able to interview three service users due to COVID-19 (preventing further interviews as originally planned and putting improvement work on hold as staff were redeployed elsewhere), for both Laura and Ashleigh this was **a very worthwhile experience, helping inform service improvement work.**

Asking service users how they felt has enabled the team to identify, and prioritise future improvement work.

Involve staff from across the service

One recommendation that the team has for others looking to engage with service users is to make the staff in the service (not just those directly involved) more aware of the work that is about to happen. By including more teams from the outset, they feel that the process of sharing learning from the interviews back to teams would have been more engaging and informed. It would also ensure that if different teams had questions they wanted including in the interviews, there would be opportunity to discuss and include them.



The patients were really happy to be asked about their experience.

Acute Transformation Programme Manager, NHS Grampian



It is absolutely vital to the work, to the service, for the staff, for management, patients [...] you need to have that in-depth patient experience. The patients come back with some amazing observations. I think it is really important [...] and I feel that the whole service has to be involved. They have to be aware of its role and how different it is to research.

Acute Transformation Programme Manager, NHS Grampian



It was clear to Laura and Ashleigh that the service users appreciated being given the opportunity to provide feedback and be involved in service improvement work.

This work was valued both to the service users and the service.