From doubters to advocates:
Northamptonshire Integrated Sexual Health’s journey into the power of real-time patient feedback
Background

Northamptonshire Integrated Sexual Health (NISH) has approximately 40,000 contacts a year and operates clinics from two hubs in Kettering and Northampton, as well as their spokes in Daventry, Corby, Wellingborough, Rushden, Weston Favell and Northampton town centre.

A diverse service with reach across a large and varied population, patients at NISH can attend for a range of services including contraception, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the management of genital skin conditions and genital pain, as well as HIV management and care.

When it came to the subject of implementing iWGC, Claire Bailey – NISH Service Manager – described NISH as one of the more reluctant departments within Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

“When we learnt of the plan to implement iWGC’s feedback solution Trust-wide, the question on people’s lips was – why? We already had systems in place that gathered feedback, so could not see the need to change, or what it would add.”

The current in-house solution – a comments book and suggestions box at reception – had served the clinic well enough over the years; the NISH even ran an annual survey assessing patient satisfaction – why was there a need to change all this now?

The information gathered from these sources found its way into departmental meetings and reports and whilst it was used to generate discussions about change and to make improvements there was scope for more extensive usage.

Compared to the data the service now receives, the information was largely generic, used only intermittently and didn’t explore with any depth how patients really felt about the service that was being provided at any point in time. Furthermore, feedback was not shared as regularly with staff and patients as it could have been.

Teething problems & solutions

Beyond an understandable reluctance to change systems lay concerns over how to ask for feedback. Nurses and doctors felt inhibited – and sometimes even embarrassed – by the idea of asking for feedback directly from patients. They were also not wholly confident that patients themselves would deliver frank and honest feedback whilst sitting in front of the clinician who had just treated them.

The team worked through these concerns together to ensure that iWGC would fully support those delivering the NISH service day-to-day.

“...and the quality of the HIV service."

“It was essential for all staff to be comfortable with this, so when our administrative team suggested they would hand out the forms in Reception as part of the patient discharge process, it was immediately clear that this was the way to go.”

Thus the idea of putting feedback forms in reception came to light, which simultaneously allowed patients to give their feedback in privacy – vital to ensuring that feedback is open and honest. Bailey used the existing meeting framework to explain the ‘what, why, when, where and how’ to staff, making certain that the changes were fully understood and supported from the ground up.

“I cannot praise the staff enough. They almost make me forget I am HIV positive.”
Delighted by the initial volume of feedback given, with 2,000 reviews collected in the first 12 months, the NISH team has put the insights gleaned from the feedback to good use, supporting a number of major changes across their service.

“One of the most interesting things has been the difference between staff perception of what mattered to patients compared with what actually mattered to patients.”

In particular, this applied to the organisation of appointments and drop-ins. Conscious of the NHS target for 48-hour access to sexual health services and believing that the arrangement best met patients’ needs, NISH had typically operated a combination of drop-in clinics and appointments.

The downside was the difficulty of predicting how many patients would arrive on a day-to-day basis for the drop-in clinics. This would lead to long waiting times and staffing levels which had to be structured around estimated numbers only. From the real-time feedback, it was evident that patients found the delays excessive and frustrating, although they were very satisfied with the care they received.

Testing a new approach, on arrival at the drop-in clinic, patients were given a guide time and chose to wait or to come back closer to their allocated time, allowing them to use their time more effectively. This immediately resulted in positive comments from people who had taken this option.

“A change of this nature would normally lead to nervousness about how it would impact on patient experience, but having the real-time positive feedback gave us the confidence that this was the right thing to do.”

NISH has also used the feedback, especially the qualitative comments, to support a business case for the much-needed refurbishment of their clinic in Northampton. Adding the voice of the patient to other harder metrics in the business case proved to be very powerful and helped secure a significant additional investment to improve the environment in which their services were delivered.

During the refurbishment, which temporarily reduced capacity, NISH had to alter their system to allow patients to book an appointment the day before. In fact, this combined the immediacy of drop-ins with the certainty of a fixed time appointment and once again, feedback showed quickly that this was very popular with patients, giving NISH the cue to investigate rolling this approach out across their other clinics. In addition, they have purchased an online booking system, which they are due to implement shortly.

“To describe the feedback as transformational would not be an exaggeration. The qualitative feedback in particular has directly influenced the way in which we deliver our services for the better.

“With the reporting provided by IWGC, I am able to interrogate the data as regularly as I need, and can print off visually impactful reports, which are then displayed prominently to the public and staff in the staff rooms on our “You said, We did” boards. I also send them out to service leads and consultants, picking out exemplary comments for staff to be congratulated on as well as ones for improvement.

“Overall, I feel this is a really comprehensive solution which offers easy access for all – even the outreach team can take advantage as they carry forms around with them. In addition to the paper feedback forms, I will be exploring the possibility of integrating a link to our bespoke IWGC feedback page from our own app, which offers sexual health information. This will further enhance the ease with which our patients can give us feedback.”

“Very personal, friendly and compassionate service, patients are treated with dignity and respect. When my partner fell ill, we owe his recovery to this team and their support.”

In summary, the key insights from NISH’s experience are:

1. The comprehensive real-time feedback from IWGC was essential for NISH to improve patient experience.

2. Don’t forget to include everyone in the process. It was the administrative team who came up with some of the best implementation suggestions. And it won’t work unless everyone understands what you are doing and why.

3. In a financially-stretched environment, having evidence from IWGC meant NISH could enhance their business case to seek funding to improve care.

4. Even in settings which require a high degree of discretion and sensitivity, IWGC’s multi-channel approach offers users choices about how they leave feedback, maximising the chances of a high response rate.
The nursing care staff are brilliant. They make you feel at home. They explain everything in a clear and simple language. Keep doing the good job.

About iWantGreatCare
Shocked at the variance in standards of care across the UK and driven by his passion as a clinician to address this, Dr Neil Bacon founded iWantGreatCare in 2008. iWantGreatCare (iWGC) set out with a vision to improve the standards of care worldwide through empowering patients to give real-time, direct, honest feedback to their doctors, nurses, dentists, physiotherapists, hospitals, GPs and more.

For individual clinicians, the platform that was first feared (in case of poor feedback) has more often than not served to re-affirm the very values and motivations which underlie the drive to work in healthcare in the first place. Grateful patients thanking those who have cared for them or their loved ones in their time of need make up the vast majority of reviews. These give staff who dedicate themselves daily to providing outstanding care for patients the recognition they deserve, from the people who matter the most. Moreover, providers report that the overwhelmingly positive feedback consistently boosts staff morale. The less positive reviews allow learning and reflection for clinicians and organisations who strive to deliver best-in-class medical care.

iWGC passionately believes that the problem of the variance in standards of care – and therefore outcomes – can be addressed when patient experience is used correctly and constructively as a quality metric. It is a game-changing technology that enables open, transparent dialogue between patients and clinicians and heralds an era of true patient partnership. iWGC now operates in 23 countries and many more languages. With over 3 million individual healthcare reviews, it is the single largest independent source of patient feedback in the world.

iWantGreatCare’s solutions
For Trusts, the detailed, comprehensive feedback gathered and processed in real time allows for individual benchmarking of quality between wards and services. iWGC turns patient experience into a robust quality metric, engaging patients in a transparent and meaningful way in real time and acting as a powerful indicator of risk and harm.

For the new models of care, iWGC offers the opportunity to prove the value of the vanguard’s approach, in timescales that are quick enough to work around the one-year funding cycle. Based on experience from working with ACNC, Cumbria CCG and the Symphony programme, iWGC’s solution for vanguards is quick to implement, unifies measurement across the many different areas of the vanguard, aligns to individual vanguard objectives and maps to a number of the key metrics for NHSE. The solution is multi-channel, easy to access for hard-to-reach groups and covers PREMs and PROMs in all settings, whether community or acute, primary or secondary.

iWGC believes in a long-term partnership approach with its clients and is genuinely dedicated to improving healthcare for the benefit of all patients across the UK.

To find out more about iWGC’s solution, please contact clients@iwantgreatcare.org or call +44 (0)1993 868428.