

NHS Patient Experiences - patient survey

Introduction

In October 2004, the National Audit Office commissioned Ipsos-UK to conduct research for our Patient safety study.

The omnibus survey of patients was part of a much larger and wider-scale research project. This report provides a summary of main findings generated from a sample of 2,061 adults aged 15+ on the topical subject of their experiences of NHS hospital care, in particular as to whether they suffered any harm.

Research methodologies and sample

Interviews were conducted with the general population aged 15+ in the United Kingdom and took place between 29th October and 4th November 2004. In total 2,061 interviews were conducted in order to gather information for this particular study. The sample was then weighted to 2,057 adults in order to reapportion the population within sex, age, social grade and working status to achieve a balanced and representative sample. The sample profile broke down as follows:

Classification information		National profile: Total sample N = 2057 (weighted) (per cent)
SEX	Male	48
	Female	52
AGE	15 to 24	16
	25 to 34	16
	35 to 44	19
	45 - 54	16
	55 - 64	14
	65+	20
SOCIAL GRADE	AB	25
	C1	29
	C2	21
	DE	26
WORKING STATUS	Full time	46
	Part time	8
	Not working	46

Interviews were conducted using IPSOS-UK's in-home, face-to-face omnibus service CAPIBUS. CAPIBUS uses CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) and delivers a nationally and regionally representative sample of 2,000 adults aged 15 years or over every week of the year.

General conclusions

Less than half of those interviewed had been a patient in an NHS hospital in the last two years (43 per cent). Most of those who had been a patient were informed of the risks involved with their treatment (83 per cent) though only just over half (55 per cent) were told about ways they could minimise their risk of harm.

Eleven per cent of those who had been a patient in an NHS hospital during the last two years had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment. This was more likely to have occurred if the patient was not told about the risks involved with their treatment (22 per cent).

Of the 97 who suffered harm, half were informed about what had gone wrong with their treatment. Those who were informed of the risks and told about how to minimise them were more likely to have been informed of the error, showing that where a hospital communicates well with patients this tends to follow through to where an incident occurs. Most of those who suffered harm took no further action.

Most of those who were informed of what had gone wrong with their treatment were satisfied with the explanation they received. Satisfaction was more likely if they had been informed of the risks and how to minimise them beforehand.

Most of those who suffered harm were neither told about what the hospital was doing to prevent similar incidents happening to other patients nor consulted as to how the hospital could prevent similar incidents happening to someone else. Those who had been told about how to minimise their risk from harm were more likely to be informed and consulted.

Most of those who had been treated in an NHS hospital over the last two years believed that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously, however this perception was affected by how much information they received as well as if something went wrong with the treatment. Those who did not receive an explanation of the risks associated with their treatment or were not informed as to how to minimise their risk from harm were less likely to be positive, than those who suffered harm.

Main findings

Q1: Please tell me, have you been in an NHS hospital as a patient (including outpatient, day patient, A&E department or inpatient) in the last two years?

Under half (43 per cent) of adults in England had been in an NHS hospital as a patient in the last two years. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) had visited an NHS hospital as an outpatient or day patient, 18 per cent had been an in-patient and 9 per cent had been treated in the accident and emergency department.

There was little variation in likelihood to have been a patient between men and women, however women were more likely to have been treated as an inpatient (21 per cent, compared with 15 per cent of men). As may be expected, younger adults (those aged under 55) were less likely to have been in an NHS hospital as a patient (37 per cent) compared with those aged 55 and older (53 per cent).

Those in social grade AB were the least likely to have been an NHS hospital patient (36 per cent). Respondents in social grade DE were also more likely than those in other social grades to have been an inpatient (23 per cent compared to only 15 per cent of ABs).

Those working part time and not working were more likely than those employed full time to have been in an NHS hospital as a patient (50 per cent, 46 per cent and 35 per cent respectively). This pattern was also seen regarding the proportions that had been an inpatient (23 per cent, 24 per cent and 11 per cent).

Respondents who were either widowed, divorced or separated were most likely to have been an NHS patient within the last two years (52 per cent) whilst single people were least likely to have been (36

per cent) - 43 per cent of married or cohabiting respondents had been a patient. Those with children in their household were no more likely to have been a patient than those without but were more likely to have been an outpatient or day patient (25 per cent compared to 19 per cent of those without children).

Q2: Were the risks of the treatment you were about to undergo fully explained to you in a way you could understand?

Of the 881 who had been a patient in an NHS hospital in the previous two years most (83 per cent) confirmed that the risks of their treatment were fully explained in way that they could understand. Only four per cent said that their treatment involved no risk.

There were no differences by gender, social grade, working status, marital status or whether there were children in the household. Those aged 15-24 were least likely to have had the risks of their treatment explained to them in a way that they could understand (76 per cent) while those aged 55-64 were the most likely to (90 per cent). Patients in Scotland were the most likely to have received an understandable explanation of the risks of their treatment (95 per cent) whilst those in the South East were the least likely to have done so (72 per cent).

Q3: Were you told how you could minimise the risk of physical or emotional harm to yourself during your treatment?

Of the 844 who had been a patient in an NHS hospital in the previous two years where their treatment involved some risks, just over half (55 per cent) were told about ways they could minimise those risks.

There were no differences by gender, age or working status, though those in the lowest social grade were the most likely to have been told about ways they could minimise risk of harm (61 per cent) and those in the C1 group were the least likely to have been (51 per cent). There were also some differences by region: those in Greater London were the most likely to have been told about ways they could minimise risks of harm (79 per cent) whilst those in the North and in Yorkshire and Humberside were also more likely to have been (63 per cent and 62 per cent). Those in the south west and south east were the least likely to have been told about ways they could minimise risks of harm from their treatment (41 per cent and 47 per cent). There were no differences by marital status or whether there were children in the household.

Q4: Did anything go wrong with your treatment resulting in you suffering harm?

Of the 881 adults who had been in an NHS hospital as a patient within the last two years, eleven per cent had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment.

There were no differences by gender, age, social grade, working status, marital status or whether there were children in the household, however there were some differences by region. Over one quarter (26 per cent) of those in the East Midlands suffered harms as a result of something going wrong with treatment compared with only one per cent in the south west and seven per cent in East Anglia and Greater London.

Those who had not had the risks of their treatment explained to them were more likely to have suffered harm as a result of something going wrong (22 per cent) compared to those who had (10 per cent).

Q5: Did the hospital inform you of what had gone wrong with your treatment?

Only 97 adults had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment in an NHS hospital in the last two years. Of these half were informed about the problem.

Those who had had the risks of their treatment explained to them beforehand were more likely to have been informed of what had gone wrong with their treatment (55 per cent) compared to those who had not (33 per cent). Those who were told how to minimise the risks of their treatment were much more likely to have been informed of problems (70 per cent) than those who did not receive an explanation of the risks (29 per cent).

Q6: Were you satisfied with the explanation given to you?

Only 48 adults who had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment in an NHS hospital in the last two years were informed about what had gone wrong. Of these 60 per cent were completely satisfied with the explanation given, 20 per cent were generally satisfied but said the explanation could have been better and 20 per cent were not satisfied.

Those who had received an explanation about the risks involved with their treatment were more likely to be satisfied with the explanation about what had gone wrong (88 per cent) compared with those who did not receive an explanation (45 per cent). Similarly, those who were told about how to minimise the risk of harm were more likely to be satisfied with the explanation about what had gone wrong (86 per cent) compared to those who were not informed about how to minimise risk (67 per cent).

Q7: Did you take further action (e.g. formal complaint, claim for compensation etc.)?

Of the 97 adults who had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment in an NHS hospital in the last two years, most (89 per cent) did not take any further action. Just over one in ten (11 per cent) did. Those who did not believe that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously were more likely to have taken action (21 per cent) compared to those who did (4 per cent).

Q8: Did the hospital tell you what they were doing to prevent the same thing from happening to someone else?

Most (80 per cent) of the 97 adults who had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment in an NHS hospital in the last two years were not told by the hospital what they were doing to prevent the same thing from happening to someone else.

As may be expected, those who were told how to minimise their risk from harm were more likely to be told about how the hospital were going to prevent the incident from happening to someone else (22 per cent compared to seven per cent who were not told how to minimise their risk from harm).

Q9: Were you consulted about how they should prevent it happening to someone else?

Most (86 per cent) of the 97 adults who had suffered harm as a result of something going wrong with their treatment in an NHS hospital in the last two years were not told consulted by the staff at the hospital as to how they could prevent it from happening to someone else. Men were even less likely to be consulted than women (92 per cent compared to 83 per cent were not consulted).

As may be expected those who had had the risks of their treatment explained to them were more likely to have been consulted (eleven per cent) compared to those who did not receive an explanation of the risk (none). Those who were told how to minimise their risk of harm were also slightly more likely to have been consulted regarding how to prevent the incident happening to someone else: 15 per cent compared to only one per cent who were not informed about how to minimise risk.

Q10: Do you feel the hospital that you were treated in takes patient safety seriously?

Most (85 per cent) of the 881 adults who had been in an NHS hospital as a patient in the last two years believed that the hospital they were treated in took patient safety seriously.

Men were more likely to be positive than women: 89 per cent said the hospital took patient safety seriously compared to 81 per cent of women. Older patients were slightly more positive than younger patients: 83 per cent of those aged under 55 said the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously compared to 88 per cent of those aged over 55. There were no differences by social grade but part-time workers were less positive than those not working and those working full time: 77 per cent said the hospital took patient safety seriously compared to 86 per cent of those not working and 84 per cent of those working full time.

Those in the North West, the South West and Scotland were more positive (94 per cent, 91 per cent and 90 per cent respectively said that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously). Those in London and the South East were less positive, 78 per cent in each said that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously. Those with children in the household were slightly less likely to say that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously (81 per cent) compared to those without children (87 per cent).

As may be expected, adults who did not receive an explanation about the risks concerned with their treatment were far less likely to think the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously than those who did: 57 per cent compared with 90 per cent. Similarly, whilst 92 per cent of those who were told about how to minimise the risk of harm associated with their treatment thought that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously, only just over a quarter of those (27 per cent) who were not told about how to minimise their risk of harm thought that the hospital they visited took patient safety seriously. Also predictably, those who suffered harm as a result of their treatment were less positive: 61 per cent of those who suffered harm said the hospital they were in took patient safety seriously compared to 88 per cent of those who did not.