

An Action Research Study Exploring Patient Experience of ACP Care

Project aim

To develop a better understanding of patients' experience of the care they received from Advanced Clinical Practitioners (ACPs) and to share recommendations for how to improve care.

Background

Despite the focus and investment by the Department of Health and Social Care on the workforce there remain huge challenges in furnishing the roles required across both sectors to meet demand.

One role developed to meet the demand is the role of the ACP. ACPs come from a variety of professional backgrounds. They are experienced healthcare professionals usually having completed a master's level award, or equivalent, that encompasses the four pillars of practice; clinical practice, leadership and management, education, and research (Health Education England 2017). ACPs are responsible for managing clinical care in partnership with individuals, families, and carers. The ACP role allows practitioners to perform tasks usually carried out by doctors.

However, there is a lack of clarity about the development of the ACP role, a lack of understanding about how the role has been employed within Trusts and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), and about patients' experiences of the care they receive from ACPs.

The delivery of evidence-based care has not been consistently achieved, leading to differences in outcomes which cause the NHS a significant financial and clinical burden. Much of this care has not been systematically reviewed. This study provides an opportunity to better understand and implement actions that offer improvements to patients receiving care at East Suffolk and

North Essex NHS Foundation Trust (ESNEFT) and can inform best practice in deploying the ACP role more widely in similar ICSs regionally and potentially nationally.

Methods

We will conduct an action research study to explore patient experience of the care that they received from ACPs, and to identify actions that can be implemented to improve patient experience of ACPs within the ICS.

We will work with patients and ACPs from the Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs) in Clacton and Colchester. We will conduct a series of focus groups with patients and ACPs across the following five phases:

Phase 1 Focus groups with patients: Patients receiving care from an ACP will be invited to take part in one of four focus groups (two at each UTC), which will be conducted either virtually or face-to-face. Ten participants will be included in each focus group resulting in 40 participants in total. Participants will be asked three initial questions to explore their experiences and perceptions of the care they have received. Copious notes will be taken during the focus groups, and they will be recorded if permission is granted by participants. All information generated from the focus groups will be anonymised, to ensure participant confidentiality. Following this process, data will be analysed and categorised using thematic analysis. Participants in these first focus groups will be invited to participate in a further focus group to get feedback from healthcare professionals in Phase 3.

Phase 2 Focus groups with professionals: Following the data analysis from the patient focus groups in phase one, healthcare professionals (this will include healthcare professionals and NHS service managers) will be invited to participate in one of two focus groups (one at each UTC) to reflect on the findings and to develop an action plan to address any concerns raised by the patients. This will include agreeing a lead to address each theme identified and possible timelines for the actions.



There will be 10 participants in each group. Copious notes will be taken during the focus groups, and they will be recorded if permission is granted by participants. All information generated from the focus groups will be anonymised, to ensure participant confidentiality. Following this process, data will be analysed and categorised using thematic analysis. Theme leads in these second focus groups will be invited to participate in a further focus group to discuss the proposed action plan and timeline with patients in Phase 3.

Phase 3 Focus groups with patients and professionals: Following phase two, volunteers from the patient focus groups and theme leads from the healthcare professional groups will come together (in one focus group at each UTC) to reflect on the issues identified and agree an appropriate action plan and timelines to complete the actions.

Phase 4 Implementation of the action plan: Healthcare professionals will implement the action plan and give regular feedback to the Principal Investigator and the patient participants on progress.

Phase 5 Evaluation of the impact of the changes in practice: A further focus group will be conducted at each UTC including both patients and professionals to explore the changes implemented in practice by the ACPs and any impact on patient experience.