



# Improving the patient experience of ambulatory care in the surgical assessment unit

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## Project background

The surgical assessment unit (SAU) is located in a 28-bed inpatient ward at Portsmouth Hospital, a large acute hospital. The emergency surgery service is developing to enable more people to be assessed as ambulatory patients rather than as inpatients. This provides efficiencies for both the patient and the service. To cater for this, a waiting room, a three-trolley space assessment bay and a single treatment room were created as an ambulatory area at the entrance to the ward. Initially, the ambulatory service had low numbers of people attending but as it grew and developed it became clear that a more robust business plan, strategy and standard operating procedure were urgently required in addition to building work.

## Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to improve the patient experience of ambulatory care within the SAU. To achieve this, the objectives identified were to:

- Form a steering group to identify the key issues patients were experiencing
- Gain feedback via patient diaries and a focus group about patients' experiences of ambulatory care
- Collect quantitative data and process map the patient pathways
- Develop an action plan and implement changes to improve the patient experience
- Re-evaluate patients' experiences and re-audit the patient pathway after implementation of the project action plan

## Implications for practice

- Using a variety of methods to gather and understand the patient experience provides positive feedback as well as areas for improvement
- A combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides powerful information for key stakeholders and enables resources to be allocated appropriately
- Engaging a variety of nurses with different roles in a steering group can enable a variety of experiences and perspectives to be shared and used for action planning
- Planned time out of practice for the project team and the steering group is fundamental to enable planning, data collection, analysis and implementation of action plans

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## Online

Further information about the project can be accessed from: [fons.org/library/report-details?nstdid=73058](https://fons.org/library/report-details?nstdid=73058)

## Key activities and outcomes

### • The steering group

Membership of the steering group included two nurse practitioners, two registered nurses, staff nurses (one newly qualified and one more experienced), a healthcare support worker and the project team. Each member of the steering group had responsibility to feed back the outcomes from the group meetings to a specific group of staff within SAU and to take any ideas and suggestions from those staff back to the group.

### • Process mapping the patient journey

An audit form, including the key stages of the pathway, was developed and agreed by the steering group. Also included was the staffing allocation within the ambulatory area at the time of the audit. A member of the nursing staff conducted the audit in a supernumerary capacity on two separate days. Quantitative data of 50 patients were collected and analysed. Using these data, the project team developed a process map of all patient pathways within the ambulatory care area.

### • Patient diaries

The steering group decided to gather patient stories and experiences using patient diaries. Simple exercise books were used for patients to write down their thoughts, feelings and reflections on their experience in the ambulatory area. A guideline sheet was also developed to inform patients about the purpose of the diaries and included some questions for them to consider. Gaining this feedback gave a real insight into the how patients felt about their experience, offered some constructive points to consider and some very positive comments about the high standards of nursing and medical care they had received.

### • Patient focus group

Four patients attended and the project team used an adapted emotional touchpoint method to guide the focus group. The event provided an opportunity for the project team to hear the story of each patient and really discuss their experiences in a deep and meaningful way.

### • Ward environment observation

A workplace observation exercise was undertaken by the senior ward sister to explore the clinical area using the 'What I saw, heard, smelled, touched and tasted' model of workplace observation. This observation identified some potential changes to the environment, which were then incorporated into the project action plan.

### • Outcomes

The following changes were achieved:

- Improved waiting room environment
- Improved and clearer signage
- Improved and simplified documentation
- Development of the role of the ambulatory nurse
- Development of patient information leaflets and FAQ poster
- Development of a standard operating procedure/business case