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EDITORIAL

Caring for people who care

It came as no surprise to anybody (I don't think) that staff working in the NHS are not as happy as they could be. The results of the 10th annual NHS Staff Survey have just been published. While some of the results could have been predicted, the outcomes have much to offer in a number of ways.

The NHS is the world's fifth largest employer; more than 100 000 of the 1.4 million NHS employees in England responded to the survey where they were asked to respond to questions about what it was like working for the NHS in England. The Picker Institute conducted the survey on behalf of the Department of Health (DH). The data has the potential to provide a rich resource of information that, if used, could provide a platform for understanding and improving how staff fare when working for the NHS and this in turn could help to provide better care for people. This only becomes a reality when the data gathered is used appropriately, when staff are listened to and action is taken.

The survey has demonstrated that only 34% of those who responded felt that communication between senior management and staff was effective. Just under three-quarters of respondents (74%) said they were able to make suggestions to improve the work of their team or department, with only 26% saying that senior managers act on staff feedback. My analysis of the staff survey leads me to say, 'Could do better'.

Pinder et al (2013) have demonstrated that in England in hospitals with lower mortality rates, a correlation exists between members of staff who were more likely to be satisfied with the quality of care that they provide. Satisfaction levels among non-clinical staff were noted to be as closely tied to a hospital's performance as those of doctors. A stronger correlation was found among nursing staff.

In Pinder et al's (2013) study, data from the NHS 2009 staff survey was examined to determine levels of satisfaction. They focused in particular on whether or not staff would recommend their NHS trust to a friend or colleague, if care was seen in their trust as a priority, and if they were happy with the standard of care that they delivered to patients. Across the 147 acute general NHS hospitals in England, from doctors and nurses as well as administrative and support staff, more than 60 000 responses were collected. These results were then compared with the individual Hospital Standardised Mortality Ratios (HSMRs) used by the DH. With overall mortality figures to assess hospital performance, this provides a useful indicator of performance and can play a part in identifying the best and worst performing hospitals. Pinder et al (2013) are suggesting that

staff willingness to recommend their hospital could be a more sensitive indicator of the quality of care than the use of HSMRs.

In the aftermath of the publication of the Francis report into failures that occurred at the Mid Staffordshire Foundation NHS Trust, NHS trusts are being directed to renew their focus on compassion and the creation of a caring environment for patients. It was also noted in the report the central role that staff have in raising concerns about poor quality care. In Pinder et al (2013) there is evidence that staff satisfaction is correlated with organisational performance.

Staff satisfaction could therefore be used as an early warning system that may help organisations identify serious institutional failings.

Generally, NHS staff care about the work they do; they are motivated to deliver services that are patient-centred and are of a high quality. On an individual basis, being able to make a difference makes most staff feel that they are doing something worthwhile. What seems to be missing is the organisation's shared vision. Organisational culture is left wanting and it was this that was prominent when Richard Francis presented his report.

For an organisation as big as the NHS, there are challenges ahead. However, it must be acknowledged that there are some NHS organisations that clearly have a positive culture, who engage, respect, empower and listen to the people who do the caring, situating themselves as an organisation that can and do deliver world-class, safe and effective patient care. It is not clear whether greater staff satisfaction is a driver of quality or if it simply reflects it. However, there is a need to investigate further if the correlations identified can indeed help organisations within the health service to enhance the standards of nursing care and prevent the atrocities that occurred in Mid Staffordshire from being repeated.

BJN



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Pinder RJ, Greaves FE, Aylin PP, Jarman B, Bottle B (2013) Staff perceptions of quality of care: an observational study of the NHS Staff Survey in hospitals in England. *BMJ Qual Saf* Feb 20. <http://tinyurl.com/bvd4x9r>