

Case Study: Student Engagement Forum

At Bolton NHS Foundation Trust the students' voice matters and as such it is high on the pre-registration team's agenda. The Trust has created a platform – Student Engagement Forum - for students to voice their views regarding issues that affect them. The inaugural events were held in May and July 2016, the months when we had the highest numbers of students on placement at the Trust.

The Student Engagement Forum was delivered as a workshop consisting of several activities that were designed to maximise students' participation. The students' opinions were central to all discussions and staff acted mainly as facilitators.

Key Outcomes

- Improved student engagement which has an impact on retention. There is a sound body of evidence that links engagement and retention (Astin, 1984, 1993; Kuh and Vesper, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Engaging students increases the chances of them joining the workforce. An analysis of Staff Engagement and Empowerment in the NHS 2014 showed that engaged staff tend to have higher patient satisfaction (The King's Fund: 2014)
- The forum was well evaluated. 100% of the students who attended the forum reported that it met their expectations i.e. it was a safe, neutral environment in which they could air their concerns.



- Students felt an affinity with each other due to their shared experiences. They reported a strong sense of community and felt supported by each other.
- Improved channels for students' voices to be heard.
- Students reported a positive regard toward the Trust. This was evidenced by remarks such as:



Engaging and interesting. Feeling valued and respected, makes positive attitudes”



Useful to meet with students and share ideas and concerns. Feeling supported”

Background

Bolton NHS Foundation Trust is located in Farnworth, Bolton. It provides health care services to residents of the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton and the neighbouring areas. Bolton has an estimated population of 270,000. The hospital has 600 beds and a wide range of community services which generate approximately 750,000 community contacts each year. It is a centre of excellence for maternity and new-born babies. Bolton NHS Foundation Trust employs approximately 5,500 staff.

In October 2015 our healthcare students had the opportunity to join the Chief Executive, Dr Jackie Bene, for a listening lunch. Over coffee the Chief Executive was open to healthcare students' issues. Having listened to them the Trust identified several potential actions; one of which was a platform for the students' voices to be heard. This became the Student Engagement Forum.

Key Aims

- Improve student engagement within the Trust
- Improve students' feeling of being valued
- Give students a platform to air issues that do not fit into the current processes
- Raise the profile of the students voice

Key Stages of set-up

Once the need for a Student Engagement Forum had been identified a project team was set up. It consisted of Sandy Wilkie (Staff Engagement Lead), Samantha Bulpitt (Learning and Development Manager) and Itai Collier (Practice Education Facilitator). The project was underway.

It was decided that the project would be in two stages. The first stage involved setting up two workshops where feedback would be gathered regarding student issues. This case study focuses on the first stage; setting up and delivering workshops for students.

The second stage would consist of exploring possible solutions to issues raised and creating an action plan. These would be discussed at the next Student Engagement Forum which was agreed would be next year.

The inaugural events held in May and July 2016 were chosen as these were the months when most students were on placements. This did not necessarily capture the best range of healthcare student - an issue that might be considered for future projects to engage with a wider variety of students on placement.

Promotional material in the Q&A format of the upcoming workshop was sent to several sources; the students' emails, the Trust intranet and Salford University student blackboard (See Appendix 1).

In the meantime, Sam Bulpitt (Learning and Development Manager) and Itai Collier (Practice Education Facilitator) adapted a staff engagement questionnaire provided by Sandie Wilkie (Staff Engagement Lead) and set up a survey for the students to complete in preparation of the event (See Appendix 2). To support this further instruction regarding the event was sent to the students.

Once the survey was closed and students had registered for the forum as instructed an invitation letter was sent out to them along with an agenda (See Appendix 3 and 4).

How it Works

Students are invited to a Student Engagement Forum where they get the opportunity to raise issues in a supportive environment. Students are able to address each other's concerns and share strategies that have worked in similar situations for them.

There is also a problem solving section in the workshop which enables students to suggest solutions to problems captured in the survey. Typically, the issues raised in the open session reflected the domains that were rated poorly in the survey. There was a correlation between the issues raised in the survey and those raised in the session.

After the Student Engagement Forum all the questions posed are transcribed and minutes sent to the students. They are given two weeks to review the minutes and make amendments. Thereafter, the points would be finalised and addressed using the 'you said, we did' approach. Feedback would be given at the next Student Engagement Forum.

Resources

Resources were acquired from within the Trust. Members of staff whose job roles interfaced with this agenda and could be mapped to outcomes of their respective jobs were targeted. The Pre-registration Team provided all the material resources.

Key Challenges

- There were many processes which made it difficult for all the students to follow each process. Face to face meeting and word of mouth helped raise the profile of the stages. Face to face meetings took place whilst visiting placement areas and at various forums. There was a clear link between face to face meetings and responses to survey.
- Time. The project was additional to pre-arranged work aligned to objectives for that year. The Student Engagement Forum was added to the Team Objective for the year thus raising its profile and validating its importance.
- Involving the Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) in the Student Engagement Forum was a big challenge as they are not aligned to the Trust and their placements are not synchronised. The former means that students are unlikely to engage and the latter means that holding two forums will result in some student groups being missed. To overcome this in the future events will need to be planned well in advance to capture the best

Key Learning

Student involvement was not maximised due to the staged approach - some of the students failed to follow the entire process. In future we will simplify the process by sending all the information that is required in one go and then send reminders.

Nursing has the largest number of students therefore dates for the forum were arranged based on their placement dates. This resulted in low numbers of AHP students as some of the disciplines did not have students on placement on the dates chosen. The team will need to liaise with AHP Leads regarding dates of placements so as to arrange dates when the best student mix can be captured.

Sustainability

Two Student Engagement Forums will be held every year which will include feeding back actions from the previous forums.

In between the forums the mechanisms suggested by students and actioned will serve as on-going vehicles of communication and improvement in addition to current processes. The Student Engagement Forum will be added to agendas of other meetings such as the Education Governance Meeting, Practice Education Leads away days, Mentor Updates and meetings with university.

Next Steps

- Raise the profile of the Student Engagement Forum by sharing how value is being added to the hospital and other stakeholders by improving students' experience with stakeholders
- Action points raised from the Student Engagement Forum
- Arrange Student Engagement Forums for 2017
- Include in Pre-Registration Team Objectives

Supporting Material

- Appendix 1 – Promotional Material (includes Student Engagement Flyer/Student Engagement Forum)
- Appendix 2 - Survey Questions
- Appendix 3 - Letter of Confirmation
- Appendix 4 - Student Engagement Forum Agenda

References

The King's Fund, [Chris Ham: staff engagement and empowerment in the NHS](#), July 2014

A full reference list is attached

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