



Reflecting on common
themes between the National
Patient Survey 2018 and
Your Opinion Counts Health
Sector National Staff Survey
2018



Your Opinion Counts
Health Sector National Staff Survey 2018



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Introduction

The broad range of health and social care services provided by the 140,000 Health Services Executive staff serves approximately 4.7 million people across the Island of Ireland. Ireland's population is ageing and ever-growing resulting in an increasing number of people requiring access to these services. Changes in the overall population has subsequently resulted in changes in their healthcare needs. More and more the Irish public are calling for greater transparency and efficiency in public sector health services.

In recent times, the HSE has moved towards more person-centred health and social care services. This "shift" underpins the new People Strategy 2019 – 2024 with a greater emphasis being placed on supporting service-users, making services "service-user led". However, this shift toward person-centeredness does not only focus on service-users but also shines a light on staff and how they're the backbone of an effective health service. "Enabling staff and teams to perform to the best of their ability delivering services" is the new People vision of the People Strategy (*). This emphasises the HSE's commitment to developing and enhancing its large and diverse workforce. Several priorities have been identified in the updated People Strategy that will be worked towards over the coming 5 years. Themes identified in this reflection document link with the some of these new and updated priorities, namely: Priority 2 (focusing on employee experience), Priority 3 (targeting training and development of employees) and Priority 6 (targeting issues surrounding roles and objectives of employees).

Private sector research has long demonstrated the positive relationship between staff and consumer satisfaction. Although known intuitively within healthcare settings, research and action to respond to this intuition has lagged in comparison to private sector counterparts. In more recent times, a strong evidence base has been generated from healthcare organisations and services internationally which has clearly demonstrated the positive relationship between staff satisfaction and patient experience. Focusing on staff engagement and patient experience among healthcare staff and service-users in Ireland, staff engagement in the HSE is analysed using the bi-annual "Your Opinion Counts" staff surveys. The 2018 staff survey was split into 9 sections to ensure a broad overview of staff work life could be measured. The sections included: my job, my role, my organisation, leadership, line management, training & opportunity, health, wellbeing & stress, dignity at work and standard of care and service.

Common themes were extracted from the 2016 "Your Opinion Counts" Staff survey and the 2017 Patient Experience Survey. This reflection of themes suggested that the correlation between staff engagement and patient experience also holds true in Irish health services. In a similar way, this document aims to thematically analyse the results from the 2018 surveys (looking specifically at the staff from acute services) to further develop our understanding of this relationship.

The National Patient Experience Survey 2018

The National Patient Experience Survey provides patients and services users across 40 participating hospitals in Ireland an opportunity to describe their experiences using the public acute healthcare services. The survey follows the patient journey of healthcare through the hospital: admissions; care

on the ward; examinations, diagnosis and treatment; discharge or transfer; and other aspects of care, seeking to represent every patient voice. The 2018 survey was completed in May with 13,404 service users responding out of a total of eligible population of 26,752 (50% response rate). The high number of responses highlights the desire of the Irish population to talk about their experiences and have a say in how health services should be improved.

The “Your Opinion Counts” Health Sector National Staff Survey 2018

The purpose of the staff survey was to measure employee sentiment and engagement within the publically funded Health Sector. The aim of the survey, as presented to staff was “to assess current staff opinions in order to identify opportunities for improvement, which will help build a better health service for all”. The 2018 survey commenced on the 1st of September and ran until October 14th. The response rate to the survey from acute hospital staff was 15% representing 9,894 staff from a complement of 64,765.

The “Your Opinion Counts Staff Survey 2018” results provide a valuable and unique insight into how staff are feeling, their experience within the HSE and identifies areas requiring improvements. It is important to investigate whether areas requiring improvement perhaps causes a knock-on effect with regards to patient experience when using our health services.

“When employees are engaged, they are more likely to put energy into interactions with clients, and there may be a spill-over effect onto colleagues, creating a more engaged workplace generally”
(West and Dawson, 2011)

Overview of Common Themes between the Staff Survey and Patient Experience Survey

- **Service Quality:** Experience of Service (patients) & Quality of Care provided (staff) & satisfaction with Job (staff), intend to stay in job (staff)
 - **Dignity, Support & Wellbeing** Emotional support and general support (patients & staff) & interest in wellbeing and health of staff (staff)
 - **Information and decisions:** Information received (patients & staff) & better communication within teams (staff) & involvement in decisions (patients & staff)
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Discussion of Themes

Service Quality

Staff

The “Standard of Care and Services” section of the 2018 Staff Survey looks at how staff rate/feel about the standard of care currently being provided by their organisation. 31% of staff respondents believe that service levels in the organisation is improving with 70% (2 in 3) of respondents saying they would be happy with the standard of care or service provided by this organisation if a friend or family member needed treatment or care. 72% are personally satisfied with the level of service they provide service-users and patients. However, almost a third of staff believes service levels are deteriorating. It is thought that improvements in service levels must be communicated to staff to counter perceptions of service deterioration.

It is thought that examining job satisfaction and staff’s intention to remain in their job contributes greatly to the quality of care being provided by health sector staff. Based on the 2018 survey results, job satisfaction has improved since previous survey and it shows that motivation levels have also improved with almost 90% (89%) feeling that they are trusted to do their job. More than half of respondents (56%) would recommend working in the HSE to a family member or friend with 70% feel proud to work for this organisation. However, feelings of recognition remain low – more staff need to feel valued and recognised. Many are dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them for training and career development and therefore do not feel that they are being developed to their full potential.

Patient experience

Comments from the Patient Experience Survey highlighted that most respondents felt they received excellent care from doctors and nurses and that they had trust and confidence in the medical staff. Areas for concern that affected the service-users overall experience was highlighted to be due to hygiene levels of toilet facilities as well as the food being offered during the hospital stay. Patients rated the care they received on the ward to be 8.3/10 and rated examinations, diagnosis and treatment 8.2/10.

Support, Dignity and Wellbeing

Staff

77% of staff are satisfied with the support received from work colleagues with 38% feeling valued and recognised by their organisation. 41% feel that their organisation clearly demonstrates its interest in staff health and wellbeing. A similar percentage (45%) responded that their organisation tries to support a healthy lifestyle among its staff. The low percentages relating to feelings of being valued (39%) and that their organisation is interested in staff health and wellbeing needs to be improved. 67% of staff are aware of the services that are available to them to support their health and wellbeing in the workplace. Better awareness of these services may improve these measures in the future.

77% of respondents said that they are satisfied with the levels of respect they receive from patients and services users. 58% of staff are satisfied with the balance between their private and professional

lives. 56% of staff feel that their stress levels affect their work with 66% stating that they manage work-related stress well.

Patient experience

Less than half of respondents (47%) experiencing fears and worries could not, or only to a certain extent, find a member of hospital staff to talk to about their worries and fears. 41% of people who needed help managing their conditions did not receive information on how to manage their conditions after discharge from the hospital. Family and home situations were not considered during discharge planning for 40% of respondents which could affect service-users both emotionally and physically. Privacy rated positively in the 2018 results with 85% saying they were given sufficient levels of privacy during examination and treatment. Privacy levels, along with trust and confidence in hospital staff has been linked to patients reporting positive overall experience, and are therefore a very good result for acute healthcare in Ireland.

Information, Communication and Decisions

Staff

Only 37% of staff are satisfied by the quality of internal communication in the organisation. 1 in 3 do not feel involved in decisions that affect their work with only 40% feeling that they are involved in such decisions. Only 34% of respondents feel confident in the decisions made by senior management within the organisation. Upward communication has seen improvements since 2016, however further improvements are necessary as only 34% believe communication between senior management and staff is effective. More than half (58%) of respondents think that line managers communicate well with the team. Almost half (48%) of respondents say that their line managers asks for opinions before making decisions that affect their work.

Patient experience

Based on the Patient Experience survey results it is clear that information provided was a particular area that required improvement as patients frequently acknowledged the need for improved communication between service-users and medical staff. 40% of respondents said that they were not given or were only given a small amount of time to discuss their care and treatment with a doctor. 71% of patients were given an explanation of the purpose of their medication with only 44% been given information about potential side-effects of their prescribed medication. 97% of patients who had questions were given answers from nurses in a manner that was understandable. However, only 47% of respondents were either not involved or only slightly involved in the decisions about their care and treatment. 41% of survey respondents said that their family did not have sufficient opportunities to talk to a doctor. This suggests that care was not as patient-centred as it should be, and that more effort is needed to ensure that patients feel that their voices are heard. Interestingly, it was commented that improvements could be made in communication levels between and within medical teams...

“The one area I felt could improve on was the communication between nurses and doctors. Both nurses and doctors seem too busy to actually talk to each other.”

Conclusion

Based on this analysis, it is clear that similar themes run through both the findings of the staff survey and the patient experience survey. Staff and patients are experiencing challenges due to lack of communication, lack of involvement in decisions, and lack of support/ dignity, highlighting the inextricable relationship between the two. However, these issues are not necessarily new and actions for improvement are under-way, or have already been integrated based on previous feedback from staff and patients. This in itself, however, highlights that improved efforts must be made to better promote newly available or improved resources to staff. Increased knowledge of such resources may lead to increases in job satisfaction, motivation and feelings of being valued, resulting in a higher quality of services being offered to patients.

Communications between medical teams, as well as medical teams with their patients are areas which require action. This has already been acknowledged by the HSE given its inclusion in Priority 2 of the People Strategy (Priority 2.8). Actions are already in progress as The National Healthcare Communication Programme got underway during 2018. This programme aims to support healthcare staff to “take a skilled, sensitive and patient-centred approach in all conversations with patients, their families and with colleagues” (HR Report Dec 2018). It is thought that the National Healthcare Communication Programme could also result in patients and service-users being more involved in the decisions that affect them – adopting a more “nothing about me without me” style policy. This would have the potential to increase patient engagement in their care during their time spent in the health services and also their after-care, resulting in improved patient outcomes. Staff must become increasingly more aware that they are valued and that their health and wellbeing is of utmost importance to the HSE.

The HSE is always trying to find innovative ways to listen and respond to the concerns and challenges faced by staff. The Excellence Awards were introduced in 2016 and allows staff to bring forward original and creative ideas to improve services. Staff are in a unique position to recognise service needs, the Excellence Awards provides them with a platform to respond to these needs and challenges. However, as noted in the 2018 staff survey findings as well as through the People Strategy Priority 2 “Valuing Staff Voice”, actions are required to improve the communication of improvements in services. Similar actions could also promote current and future health and wellbeing initiatives, and support resources being offered to staff so as they can act as advocates for the high quality services offered within the HSE.

Coaching services are widely available throughout the HSE and offers an immediate support to staff who may require help reaching their full potential or in achieving a change in their personal or professional life. However, as found through this analysis, staff may not be aware of resources available to them and or how to access such resources. The coaching, training and development opportunities available to staff could be better communicated to ensure the People Strategy goal of having “the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time” is reached resulting in improved service quality and better patient outcomes.

One of the major findings of the “Your Opinion Counts” Staff Survey 2018 was that staff report a lack of clarity in their role and how their objectives fit with the objectives of the organisation. Literature points to appraisals and performance reviews as a way to increase staff satisfaction, motivation, clarity of roles and objectives but has also been linked to improved patient outcomes, among others.

Based on this strong evidence base, considerations must be given to the possibility of introducing a system of performance based reviews focusing on engagement and feedback to HSE staff, given the beneficial organisational outcomes associated with it. Priority 2.10 of the People Strategy calls for action to develop organisational capacity for employee feedback, the introduction of performance based reviews has the potential to reach this target.

Overall, this reflection illustrates the importance of staff engagement efforts as vital human resource tools in healthcare services. The symbiotic relationship between staff and patients is recognised through this document and the previous analysis of themes, however we must move towards a more robust method of measuring this relationship to ensure progress is continuously being made and service quality constantly improving.

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Annex:

