

Making it Work for You.

The public inquiry into the appalling actions at Mid Staffordshire Hospitals called for “fundamental culture change” within the NHS. One of the government’s responses is to assess patients’ satisfaction with the NHS service they have experienced and to find out if they would recommend it to others or not.

As from the 1st April 2015, all NHS dental practices will be required to adhere to the Friends and Family Test (FFT). The guidance is actually quite short and to the point however, there are a small number of mandatory requirements that should be noted.

Opportunity to Improve

Although there is skepticism on the new initiative, having looked at the experience of GP surgeries and hospitals that implemented the FFT in December 2014 and 2013 respectively, it has been seen as an opportunity for them to get to know their patients better and consequently making their organisations run that bit more smoothly.

Some hospitals report a 30% response rate, which in most industries would be seen as exceptional, and the data as incredibly valuable to help improve their service.

Within our “consumer” life we frequently use web sites or social media channels to seek other people’s point-of-view and ratings on potential services and products we might want to purchase. The FFT is the equivalent to that in the medical world!

Asking the Right Questions.

The guidance requires the practice to make available the question(s) to patients and then feed the results back to NHS England each month. NHS England then publish the results on the NHS Choices website for potential ‘customers’ to view.

The questions can be asked in the old-fashioned way, pen and paper, or you could use online tools to save on administration, such as SurveyMonkey® where the results are automatically collated for you. Thirdly, there are already suppliers out there that can facilitate all this for you at a reasonable price, so it has minimal impact on your current people resource.

Seize the Opportunity

So, what if it is bad news? Then it should be seen as an opportunity to rectify whatever the complaint is. It is reported that a business only hears from 4% of its dissatisfied customers who then go on to tell at least 9 other potential customers of their dissatisfaction¹.

When you get positive feedback, use it to your advantage. Publish it in the waiting room, place it on your web site and Tweet about it. You could decide to

add a few extra questions to the mandatory FFT (although not too many, you don't want it to be off-putting) and then act upon the outcomes accordingly.

Finally, the FFT could be seen as another piece of paperwork that needs administrating. Or, as it is not going away anytime soon, it could be used as an opportunity to make improvements within the practice, to increase patient satisfaction and potentially gain new "customers" to help expand the practice.

For more information about the ADG visit www.dentalgroups.co.uk.

ⁱ "Understanding Customers" by Ruby Newell-Legner