



All the latest news, views and reviews from the Patient Opinion team

Issue 11 - December 2011

What's the real story of 2011?

The Scrooge's amongst us may try, but there's no denying it - it's Christmas, and 2011 is drawing to a close. It's been quite a year.

The NHS and its surrounding world has been a difficult place to be this year and for all those involved it's been some journey, where few have avoided the turbulence. The release of the [Health and Social Care bill](#) in January left many people anxious. It set out reforms which promise to radically change how health services are commissioned and delivered to make the NHS 'the envy of the world'.

So, while policy has been tossed between politicians and the media like a hot potato, what's been happening on the ground - what's the real story of 2011?

The great news is that we received a record number of stories this year. More and more people are online and they are choosing to talk about, and with, the NHS. Great news for health care staff, because it's never been easier to find out what people think about your services, and what you can do to make them better.

Earlier this year, [our report 'In their words'](#) highlighted the core concerns for patients and their families. A lack of care and compassion, poor communication and poor staff attitudes were the biggies, but staff shouldn't be disheartened. Together you, patients and the Patient Opinion platform smashed through the 200 service improvements mark. Clearly, staff are stepping up to the challenge of delivering more for less.

This for us is the key to making the reforms a success. Patients who share their stories and suggestions because they want to help, and staff who find that by responding in a constructive and human way they really can deliver better care. At a time when money is short, patients and staff acting together to improve services is really the only way to make the NHS the 'envy of the world'.

In rounding up this year, we collected together a handful of the stories we've received in 2011 that really struck a chord with us, good and bad - you can read them [here](#). From the Patient Opinion team, we wish you all a very merry Christmas, and look forward to an exciting 2012!

This month our Patient Opinion pioneers are the surgical staff of the [Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust](#), to whom we'd like to give a hearty welcome. They are an unusual choice for pioneers, since the trust is only just getting underway with Patient Opinion, and doesn't yet have much experience under its organisational belt.

But we've chosen to highlight them for their bold and fearless leap into the world of public online feedback. Far from simply dipping a toe in the water, they've leapt in feet first, adding 80 staff from right across the surgical specialties to their subscription in one fell swoop.

RECORD NUMBER OF STORIES

We've always said that sharing a story makes a difference and it appears that the public agree with us. For the second month in a row PO is celebrating record numbers of stories being shared on the site. We were delighted when October's figures passed our previous record set in June 2011 and then in November we passed that total again. This coupled with ever increasing site traffic shows that more and more people are choosing to share their story with us and of course, you.

Quote of the month

"Thank you for letting us stay past visiting hours, thank you for treating her with respect... thank you for your kind words after our tragedy today."

<http://www.patientopinion.org.uk/opinions/52886>

Patient Opinion pioneers



This suggests a clarity of vision and a determination of purpose which gives us a strong feeling that this acute trust is serious about hearing from its patients and carers online - and we're looking forward to giving them as much support as we can.

Given the [Devon Access and Referral Team](#), and [Sentinel CIC in Plymouth](#), as already well-established Patient Opinion users, and North Devon Healthcare due to begin using our service in January, we're beginning to think that Devon may be the place to watch in 2012. We'll keep you informed on progress.

www.patientopinion.org.uk

a free, confidential and independent website.

Or call us during working hours (local rate):

0845 113 0012

A word from the Doc...



Paul Hodgkin

So GPs don't like on-line feedback. At least that's what a [report in yesterday's Observer](#) said. At Patient Opinion we were particularly interested in this as we are just beginning to pilot how the PO system could be used with 'consenting' Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) who have asked us to put their GP services on the system as well as using us to inform their commissioning decisions.

GPs of course have long had the option to 'throw patients off the list' as a last resort

The article was based on figures released by NHS Choices which showed that over the last 2 years 28,000 people have posted comments about their general practice via the NHS Choices service. Some 2,000 of these were not published because they did not meet the editorial policy whilst the same number – 2,000 – of responses from staff had to be withdrawn because they were deemed to increase rather than decrease disagreement between the parties.

From our point of view both figures are extraordinarily large. At Patient Opinion we would expect to have to removed very many fewer stories (around 3 per 10,000 stories) due to swearing, profanity or racist comments. And whilst we don't prohibit

NHS responses, and certainly recognise that in some instances they are woefully inadequate, ones that are aggressive enough to make us think about asking them to be taken down are vanishingly rare.

So what is going on? An obvious answer is that general practice is just starting out on its learning curve about how to handle

negative comments online. But perhaps it is also the case that practices feel more strongly precisely because they sit in their communities and the relationship with patients is – or at least feels – different to them? GPs of course have long had the option to 'throw patients off the list' as a last resort. So maybe this lowers the threshold for them being less courteous on-line.

Interestingly the very [early results](#) from our pilot with practices are showing many positive stories as well as an equal number of negative ones accompanied by some very good, sensible responses. So maybe the important key variable is working collaboratively with the practices - doing with them, not to them.

Meet



Penny

Dr Penny Woods
Chief Executive of the Picker Institute

What is the Picker Institute?

We are a charity that champions the patient's experience of healthcare. We build and use evidence to improve the quality of healthcare, aiming to ensure that all patients have a good experience every time.

In what ways do Picker and Patient Opinion collaborate?

Both organisations have the same fundamental aims - to improve patients' experiences of healthcare and to provide meaningful information that enables patients to make informed choices. We provide different and complementary services that can be used with each other - Paul and I find ourselves at various meetings and conferences, reinforcing each other's messages!

Why do you feel feedback is so crucial to improving health services?

Without feedback from patients, providers and professionals have no way of knowing if they are doing well or badly, and cannot identify what and how they need to improve. They also cannot see if actions they are taking are working if they do not have robust evidence of improvement. There is a huge amount of quantitative and qualitative data out there, we all need to make sure it is used properly!

What do you enjoy outside of work?

My family, good food, exotic travelling, skiing and scuba - anything that brings all of them together is my idea of heaven! Challenging politicians and policy-makers on behalf of patients is also hugely enjoyable, but hard to combine with my other passions!

Join the conversation

Over the past 6 years, we've enjoyed observing new kinds of conversations flourish between patients and health care staff. We've always encouraged charities, third sector organisations and patient associations to contribute to these conversations too. This is helpful for patients and the NHS, especially in signposting people to supportive services outside of the NHS, like complimentary therapies, that can help people get back on their feet.

Patient Opinion can also be a great help to the charities and groups themselves. In Scotland, we ran an enthusiastic "Discover Patient Opinion" session as part of Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland's, 'Self Management Week 2011'. The organisations and individuals who participated noted many benefits of how Patient Opinion could

support their work in sharing and gathering information, feeding in to consultations, pinpointing trends, and using stories to generate stories. They really connected with the Patient Opinion commitment to encouraging open and transparent conversations.

At the event, Ian Welsh, Chief Executive of the [Long Term Conditions Alliance Scotland](#), said "I believe that Patient Opinion can make a key contribution to all three of these (Scottish Government Healthcare Strategy) ambitions by ensuring that people's voices are heard and in facilitating dialogue between people and the services they receive."

In our continued efforts to bring patient associations and charities into these online

conversations about healthcare, we are inviting these organisations to register with us. Registering means that you receive automatic alerts to stories which are both topically and geographically relevant to you, and are able to offer responses.

MIND, Beat and YoungMinds are ahead of the curve having already offered [fantastic responses to patient stories](#) on Patient Opinion. Their responses have hit just the right tone, and have provided some really helpful information about local support.

If you want to find out how your organisation can benefit from registering with Patient Opinion, please just get in touch with us at info@patientopinion.org.uk. We'd love to hear from you.

www.patientopinion.org.uk

a free, confidential and independent website.

Contact us...

If you want to get in touch email us at:
newsletter@patientopinion.org.uk