

425: Listening to vulnerable groups: Improving patient safety for people with learning disabilities

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Objective:

To involve (users and carers) in identifying and understanding the patient safety issues for people with learning disabilities and to develop a programme of work around the areas identified. This is the first time the specific patient safety risks for this often vulnerable and socially excluded group have been looked at.

Methods:

A literature review was undertaken to identify what had been written about patient safety and people with learning disabilities. An independent consultant, Jackie Downer, a person with a learning disability, and her enabler worked closely with the NPSA throughout the project. 'Speaking Up!', a learning disability self advocacy charity from Cambridge in the UK, were commissioned by the NPSA to gather the healthcare experiences of people with learning disabilities and their carers across England and Wales. They met with 46 people with learning disabilities and 12 family carers. The charity produced a report from the consultation that highlighted 12 main areas of concern based on patient safety. Many of the people involved felt that this was the first time they had been listened to on the issue of safety. The NPSA also held focus groups in England and Wales with approximately 150 front-line health and social care staff. The majority of staff worked directly with people with learning disabilities and they shared examples of patient safety incidents they had been involved in and examples of things that had improved. From this work the NPSA Assistant Director for Learning Disabilities compiled a report, 'Understanding the patient safety issues for people with learning disabilities'. The report identified five patient safety priorities and was launched at the NPSA Conference in February. The next step, to develop solutions, has been identified by the NPSA.

Results:

Refer to the report of the consultation by 'Speaking Up!'. The NPSA report 'Understanding the patient safety issues for people with learning disabilities'.

Conclusions:

1. There are specific patient safety issues for vulnerable group
2. Working with advocacy groups can be a very effective way of understanding the issues for vulnerable groups and identifying areas for safety and quality improvement