



"I'm not a complainer": Interviews with older people and carers on their experiences of health and social care in NHS Highland

Final report of research findings

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"I'm pleased that somebody is listening. It might be some help." (17)

Patient consultation is essential to achieve policy imperatives concerning personalisation, self-management and co-production in health and social care services. HSCN has commissioned evaluative research to highlight the formative factors determining the effective delivery of older people's services in NHS Highland and to offer insight into older people's perspectives and experiences of service quality. This independent user-led research aims to open up a dialogue with service providers and to facilitate patient-driven improvements in health and social care. The project has been conducted against the policy background of the integration of health and social care for adults, the Re-shaping Care for Older People initiative to shift the balance of care to the community and the drive towards 'person-centred' care outlined in the Healthcare Quality Strategy. NHS Highland also has to address the demographic challenge of service delivery to the increasing older population in the Highlands. The Highland Council estimates by 2035 the number of people over 65 will increase by 79% and the percentage of older people aged 75+ will more than double.ⁱ

Key research questions and methods

The project focussed mainly on older patients recently discharged from hospital and/or in receipt of care packages. Service users and their relatives were asked which elements of their services had worked well and what improvements, if any, could be made. Topics included home care, hospital care, discharge planning, care homes, transport and community-based services. Qualitative interviewing and data analysis were used to reveal the complexity of people's experiences, feelings and expectations of their services and the decisions they make about their care. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of older people aged over 60 years and their relatives in Inverness-shire, Ross-shire, Sutherland and Lochaber. In total 34 service users, aged 62 to 94 years old, were interviewed along with 38 carers and relatives and six professional health and social care workers.

Summary of findings

On the whole there is satisfaction with medical treatment and nursing care, with interviewees praising hard-working staff in both primary and secondary care. Similarly people are generally happy with the quality of home carers coming into their homes. Good quality care homes with motivated staff, good leadership and a welcoming environment are also valued highly. Although the interviews show that older people appreciate their services and are very happy with many aspects of health and social care, there are several common emergent issues. Areas for improvement include:

- home care capacity and organisation
- hospital discharge planning and medication
- communication with relatives in hospital
- the eye clinic for AMD patients
- anticipatory care and 'rehabilitation'
- support for carers, day care and respite
- the quality of local care homes
- services for people with dementia
- public and patient transport in remote rural areas
- the NHS complaints system.

Key areas of user need

Older service users and carers appreciate caring, hard-working professionals who deliver high quality services and support them in living their lives as fully as possible. They are also clear about the difficulties they encounter and the issues they would like to see improved. Key areas of need arising from the interviews with older people and carers are outlined briefly below:

Home care

An integrated and reliable home care service with increased capacity and extended service range along a re-ablement model with longer visits and night care.

Hospital admission and care

- *Discharge planning* - involvement of relatives and medication ready at discharge
- *Communication with relatives* - contact person to answer questions and give information
- *Advocacy* for families and patients making decisions about care
- *Eye clinic* - information, advice and support for Age-Related Macular Degeneration patients
- *Dementia care* – appropriate high quality specialist care for people with dementia and extension of Butterfly Scheme
- *Anticipatory care* planning to reduce admission

- *Falls* reduction on wards amongst frail older patients
- *Dignity* in personal care arrangements

Carers

Recognition, support and information for carers with opportunities for respite and day care.

Care homes

High quality local care homes with support from volunteer 'lay' inspectors.

Remote rural areas

Local innovative solutions to service delivery issues like public transport, patient transport, respite and dementia care services.

Complaints system

Patients are supported to give their feedback and reassured there will be no impact on care.

Older patient voice heard

Independent user-led collection of feedback for quality assurance and service innovation.

The research shows that older people are happy with many aspects of their services but several areas for improvement emerge. Some issues are relatively straightforward while others are very challenging and would require significant resources to implement. The key challenge is keeping people at home and in their communities where they want to be. An integrated and holistic home care service is necessary to achieve this key RCOP objective. In addition it also requires the development of other vital support services such as transport, as well as strategies to tackle social isolation. Older people's views should be heard and valued. They should have more control over their lives and be allowed to participate in the planning, design and delivery of services on which they rely for their health and well-being.

ⁱ *Population projections for council areas 2010 – 2035*, Policy and Information Briefing Note No. 52, July 2012, Highland Council: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C97B4293-EE22-430F-AEFF-83DFA8E68D1E/0/Note52CouncilAreaPopulationProjections2010.pdf>