

Healthwatch Walsall Statutory Response to the Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust Quality Account 2015-16

Overview

Healthwatch Walsall (HWW) notes that this has been a particularly challenging year for Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust. Our own extensive consultation of public experience, in support of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in September 2015 revealed concerns about some services. The Trust rating of inadequate and being placed in Special Measures by CQC reaffirmed aspects of our own findings.

The Patient Care Improvement Plan to improve quality and safety of care especially in maternity and emergency care which were identified as being of particular concern is acknowledged.

HWW recognises that the Trust has been operating in a difficult environment with significant turnover of senior staff. HWW also recognises the commitment, openness and transparency of the Chief Executive, Richard Kirby, in taking the Trust forward and we are happy to endorse the improvement plan now in place. Furthermore, Healthwatch Walsall has offered to support this process to help ensure that the patients' perspective is represented.

Previous Quality Account response and lessons learnt

We have in previous years expressed concerns about the Quality Account (QA) process which allows little time to review the data and to make meaningful commentary on its contents. This year, we acknowledge the efforts made by the Trust to provide our Hospital Intelligence Workstream Group with information and data in a more timely manner and we would like to thank both Amir Khan and Malcolm Roper-Moore from the Trust for their efforts in this regard. This has provided HWW opportunities to feedback initial comments at an early stage for incorporation into subsequent drafts.

That said, at the time of writing this response, the final draft received is missing some explanatory text and statistics and therefore the comments we make are necessarily qualified.

Following our previous recommendations we are pleased to note that the QA now includes some historical data which enables a picture of performance trends to be built up over time. Regrettably there is no easy read version available which would have facilitated wider consultation, however we are aware of the constraints of the prescriptive framework for the QA.



Response for 2015-16 Quality Account

The Trust recognises its placement into Special Measures as an opportunity for improvement and to rectify problems - this approach is welcomed.

Following the 'inadequate' rating for some key issues the Trust is reviewing and taking action to improve the identified shortcomings and is also aligning its plans to the NHS Five Year Forward View which is also welcomed.

Consultation carried out by HWW, prior to the CQC inspection found that people who were dissatisfied cited issues of waiting times, quality of care and communication as being concerns. Additionally, organisational issues were raised by patients and their relatives. Mention is deservedly made that patients who expressed high satisfaction commended the treatment received and the care given by staff and this can usefully provide a yardstick for the Improvement Plan.

We have previously highlighted the struggling performance of A&E services and the CQC report confirmed this as being inadequate overall. We welcome the detailed action plan surrounding this service and we have advised our willingness to support this work; we are currently doing engagement around the softer issues for the service looking particularly at patient experience and communications in A&E which we will feedback to the Trust to help support the improvement process.

Concerns about the hospital discharge process were highlighted in our earlier report which was presented to the Trust and other key stakeholders in July 2015 and this continues to be an area of concern for HWW. We note that admission, discharge and transfer continued to be amongst the top six most frequently recorded safety incidents. The recently published report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman into unsafe discharge from hospital found nationally a 36% increase in complaints linked to people having a poor experience of being discharged.

We therefore reaffirm that discharge processes from hospital, referral to other services and the effectiveness of care in the community can be improved for patients although the answers do not all lie within the reach of the Trust alone. HWW welcomes the opportunity to work with the Trust and other key stakeholders in the discharge process to implement the recommendations in the HWW Hospital Discharge Report.

The Trust had already recognised that its processes for handling and responding to complaints needed to be improved and earlier this year established a Complaints Monitoring Panel which HWW attends as an observer. This was welcomed however we believe that there needs to be more emphasis and commitment to this process to ensure that responses to complaints are made in a timely and appropriate manner so that any lessons learnt can be quickly acted upon. Feedback from our participation in the 2 sub groups that support the Panel is that the process appears to be stalling.



In the ‘learning from mistakes’ league recently published by the Department of Health to identify the level of openness and transparency in NHS provider organisations, the Trust was ranked 215th out of 230 NHS trusts and was classified as having a poor reporting culture. The Trust recognises that incident reporting, which formed part of this assessment, is only effective if the organisation learns lessons from these incidents and new processes are introduced to ensure that lessons learnt are shared across the organisation. HWW supports the Trust’s objective to embed a positive learning culture across the organisation.

Conclusion

Healthwatch Walsall accepts that the Trust recognises the position it is in as an opportunity to put into place much needed system changes, some of which it has been grappling with for some time.

Following the CQC findings it now has the time and space to successfully enact these service improvements. The priorities for improvement in the Quality Account reflect the actions needed to address the CQC findings.

Healthwatch Walsall considers that whilst the priorities may be challenging for the Trust to achieve, their implementation should result in better patient experience and outcomes and we offer to work with the Trust to help achieve this.