

How patients' stories improve health services

by Dr Peter Levin and Dr Kath Maguire,

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It is important to recognise the many health care professionals who provide an excellent service. Yet, when things don't go well, it is vital to learn and avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Sometimes patients feel reluctant to give negative feedback. They might not like complaining, fear giving offence or think that they can't make a difference.

We would like to tell you about a patient story that did make a difference and share some ways you can get your voice heard.

Last year we heard about Mrs P, an elderly patient who was left feeling anxious and confused. The different nurses visiting each week to dress her leg ulcer often did not know what had been done before and gave contradictory advice.

Our efforts to raise Mrs P's concerns have been described in detail by one of us (<https://bit.ly/2KN6rTX>). This October we met with members of the Community Nursing Team to discuss learning from Mrs P's story.

This was really encouraging. We heard that Mrs P's and other patient stories have been discussed at team meetings and used to improve both the training and management of Community Nursing in Cornwall.

Teams have been reorganised to make sure patients are seen by the same nurses as often as possible and that there is more time for teams to share information and skills.

The way that medical supplies are managed has been improved to help nurses access what patients need more effectively.

It was also really good to hear that patients are being actively encouraged to express concerns or complaints directly to the nurse who visits them or by phone to their Community Nursing team leader or manager.

All complaints are investigated and patients are told about any action taken to address their concerns.

The Community Nursing teams share improvements made in response to patient feedback at a Cornwall-wide forum so that other patients benefit too.

This provides patients and carers with a direct way to help improve the quality of community health services.

If you don't feel able to complain directly, you can also contact the Patient Advisory and Liaison Service, or PALS, which exists to support patients to raise concerns.

For services managed by the Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, like Community Nursing, Community Hospitals and Mental Health services, the PALS number is 01208 834620.

For the service covering West Cornwall Hospital, St Michael's or Treliske call 01872 252793.

Sharing your experiences and concerns for health and social care services can make a difference and help to make services better and safer for us all.

Your concerns continue to be important to us at West Cornwall HealthWatch, and we are interested in hearing your experiences of giving and receiving feedback. Email us at:

westcornwallhealthwatch@yahoo.co.uk