

ENSURING QUALITY OF AGED CARE THROUGH BEST PRACTICE FEEDBACK SYSTEMS

When consumer feedback systems are public, transparent, and independent of the provider, so that all interested stakeholders can see what consumers are saying and how providers are 'listening and responding', then there is a greater likelihood that the quality of care will be improved.

Feedback in Aged Care is an important driver for quality and safety outcomes for those that rely on these services. Australia is facing a transformative time within the Aged Care industry, and the federal government has updated its quality framework for the industry with a focus on creating a single framework for all aspects of Aged Care. The *Aged Care Quality Standards Consultation Paper 2017* highlights a number of standards that they believe are best practice for complaints management. In this document we list what we believe a strong, robust feedback system needs to do to drive service quality and safety in Aged Care.

1. ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK

Perhaps the most obvious, but also the most important thing a feedback system needs to do is gather feedback. Current feedback systems are often reactive, waiting for consumers to provide their feedback and dealing with it as it arises. An aged care provider that is focused on continuous improvement needs a proactive feedback system, one that actively seeks regular feedback from consumers. This can be achieved in a number of ways. First, a system that is public and online allows more consumers to engage with the platform - and often in the aged care space it is the carer or relative that is providing the feedback. The transparency of the system also allows consumers to see that they are truly open to feedback. Secondly, a system that is anonymous supports consumers to share feedback, particularly the more constructive, as they feel safe and secure to do so. And finally, a system that does not constrain the consumer to a provider-created survey or feedback structure, but rather supports the consumer to 'share their story', encourages clear, detailed and honest feedback that the provider can take back and act on to drive change, as well as commendation, throughout their organisation.

2. DRIVE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Consumers offer a keen insight into what is working, and what is not, about the care an organisation is providing. As mentioned above, provider-created surveys often constrain the consumer to sharing only what the provider wants to know. A system that allows consumers to 'share their story', good or bad, gives providers meaningful insight into what is important to them, which in turn should drive positive change and outcomes for the consumer. This can also be communicated back to the consumer to show how the provider is using their feedback for change. At the end of the day, the provider is there to ensure that the consumers' needs are met and encouraging and gathering bespoke feedback allows the provider to drive change that meets those needs.

3. BE RESPONSIVE

Current feedback systems are often very provider-centric and the consumer can be left wondering when, or if, their feedback is going to be dealt with. A strong feedback system allows consumers to share their experience in real-time, with updates as the provider addresses or resolves their feedback. This is best done through a system that is driven by anonymity and transparency as it shows that the provider is open to feedback, and allows them to be responsive in sharing how they have taken on consumer feedback and, where relevant, created change within the organisation.

4. CREATE DIALOGUE

As mentioned above, provider-centric feedback systems can often leave the consumer waiting to hear back from the provider, and can make it difficult for the consumer to have a meaningful conversation about their feedback. Some 'trip-advisor' style sites offer the ability to leave a 'review' or 'rate' the organisation, but do not create a dialogue that can be achieved without the provider always asking the consumer to 'contact them directly'. A feedback system that facilitates a robust conversation can ensure that the consumer 'feels heard' and can see that their feedback has been addressed and used for change.

5. ENGAGE STAFF

To drive positive change within an organisation, all staff should be engaged in the process. Currently most feedback systems are managed by a 'communications' or 'quality and safety' team, with the feedback they receive not being disseminated to all the staff that can learn from that feedback. For real cultural change and continuous improvement to be driven throughout an organisation, genuine stories from consumers about the care they received, or their loved ones, needs to be distributed to all relevant staff. The best way for this to be achieved is if all staff have real-time access to stories told about the care they or their colleagues have provided. Connecting with real people and their stories, and not just feedback data, is one of the most effective ways to communicate constructive feedback and for it to have an impact on staff and drive learning at all levels of the organisation. Furthermore, allowing access to real-time stories about positive care outcomes that commend staff improves staff moral and drives better outcomes for consumers.

REFERENCES

Australian Government, Department of Health 2017, *Draft Aged Care Quality Standards Consultation Paper 2017*, Australian Government, viewed 26 July 2017, https://consultations.health.gov.au/aged-care-access-and-quality-acaq/single-quality-framework-draft-standards/supporting_documents/Single%20Aged%20Care%20Quality%20Framework%20%20Draft%20Quality%20Standards%20Consultation%20Paper.pdf