

Academic Health Science Network case study

Case study name: Learning from Excellence

AHSN/s involved: West Midlands Academic Health Science Network

Images submitted:

Images: Video link and photo attached in Dropbox

Overview summary

Traditionally, safety in healthcare has focused on avoiding harm by learning from error, but this approach may miss opportunities to learn from excellent practice. Excellence in healthcare is highly prevalent, but there is no formal system to capture it.

Since 2014, staff in Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust have been using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the method for a programme called Learning from Excellence. Since August 2016, Appreciating People (AP) has been working for the West Midlands Patient Safety Collaborative, running a series of fully booked introductory talks on Learning From Excellence and two-day AI training courses. The participants responded to using AI to create positive education, and work on their quality improvement. In March 2017, Learning From Excellence was shortlisted for a HSJ Patient Safety Award in the Education and Training category.

Challenge/problem identified

Traditionally, safety in healthcare has focused on avoiding harm by learning from error, but this approach may miss opportunities to learn from excellent practice. Excellence in healthcare is highly prevalent, but there is no formal system to capture it. The traditional approach is known as the 'Safety-I' approach – where safety is defined as a condition where the number of adverse outcomes was as low as possible.

However, the Safety-I view doesn't stop to consider why human performance practically always goes right. Things don't go right because people behave as they are supposed to – but because people can and do adjust what they do to match the conditions of work. Despite the obvious importance of things going right, traditional safety management has paid little attention to this.

Actions taken

Since 2014, dedicated staff in Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust have been using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the method for a programme called Learning from Excellence, and the WMAHSN has had such good reports of their work and such interest from its members that they have decided to support its rollout across the region. Since August 2016, Appreciating People (AP) has been working for the Patient Safety Collaborative of the West Midlands Academic Health Science Network (WMAHSN). AP ran a series of introductory talks on Learning From Excellence called Where did it all go right? and then asked interested people to sign up for one of five two-day AI training courses.

Impacts / outcomes

All five AP courses were all fully booked. The participants were really interested in using Appreciative Inquiry to take another approach to learning and enhancing safety. The participants responded to using AI to create positive education, and work on their quality improvement. It helped them build resilience, as they were focusing on the things they were good at, and celebrate their successes.

The idea of Learning from Excellence, focusing on what's gone right in healthcare rather than just what's gone wrong, is about shifting to a more positive culture of sharing best practice and recognising success. It has been enthusiastically adopted by several organisations, and more than 150 people have been through WMPSC's Learning from Excellence programme.

In March 2017, Learning From Excellence was shortlisted for a HSJ Patient Safety Award in the Education and Training category.

Supporting quotes from a stakeholder / partner or service user

Adrian Plunkett, Consultant Paediatric Intensivist at Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust: "We regard excellence as something to gratefully accept, rather than something to study and understand. We believe that studying excellence in healthcare can create new opportunities for learning and improving resilience and staff morale. WMAHSN helped us to scale it up. The first phase is to start spreading the concept to interested individuals around the NHS in our region. In the first instance, the AHSN hosted a series of roadshows and we ran three workshops in the region where my colleagues and I talked about the initiative – what the concept and philosophy is, but also how we've delivered it and what we've seen so far."

Quote from a participant of AI training: "The Appreciative Inquiry training will help me to run round table meetings exploring episodes of excellence better. But it will also be useful for my everyday practice, where I will use its strength-based methodology to help me get the best out of the theatre teams I work in."

Patient impact

Although the event that triggers an excellence report will often involve patient care, this is not always the case. We believe the main impact on patients comes through the impact of the initiative on staff morale and appreciation. We would like to investigate ways to involve patients in reporting and crucially, learning from episodes of excellence care.

Plans for the future

Studying excellence in healthcare can create new opportunities for learning and improving resilience and staff morale. We want to encourage this approach in healthcare and we aim to enable other health organisations in the region to adopt Learning from Excellence and Appreciating Inquiry in their work of practice.

We are supporting in house AI training courses, through funding and via our network of contacts. We are holding an Advanced AI Practitioner course to cultivate a community of experienced AI practitioners within our region who can share their experience more widely and we are holding an LfE Community Event to share knowledge and experience of the LfE approach and to discover new applications of these initiatives.

We also wish to formally study the impact of introducing learning from excellence within teams and departments in the region, through research projects and quality improvement interventions.

Which national clinical or policy priorities does this example address?

- Berwick Report

Tips for adoption

Start and end dates:

- Start year: 2014

Project contact for further information

Helen Hunt, Assistant Programme Manager - Patient Safety Collaborative, West Midlands Academic Health Science Network, helen.hunt@wmahsn.org.

Media contact for further information

Manish Patel, Communications Officer – Patient Safety Collaborative, West Midlands Academic Health Science Network, manish.patel@wmahsn.org, 0121 371 8045.