



# Great expectations

What does customer focus mean for the NHS?

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We help our members improve health and patient care by:

- influencing policy, implementation and the public debate
- supporting leaders through networking, sharing information and learning
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# What does customer focus mean for the NHS?

It can be argued that there's a fundamental difference between a patient in an NHS hospital – or someone visiting their GP – and the customer in a shop or hotel. All sorts of different emotions and pressures are in play, and no money changes hands.

But from the patient's point of view, the experiences have much in common. The NHS patient is the same person who goes shopping and stays in hotels. Why should they, at the hospital door, leave their expectations to be treated as well as by any other organisation keen to have their custom?

Changes in technology and an increased access to information mean that increasingly NHS organisations are under pressure to provide a service to a more informed patient.

Customer focus directs an organisation towards offering its customers the best possible experience of its services. In an age of rising expectations among service users, it is becoming a critical issue for healthcare providers. This report examines the main strands of what such a policy involves,

gathered from interviews with nine organisation leaders who can talk about customer focus with some authority.

They include leaders of companies who have transformed themselves in recent years in pursuit of clearer customer focus, along with companies whose success has long depended on serving their customers well. There are also leaders from within health services, including a US healthcare provider, whose organisations are all engaged on a deliberate strategy of improving the patient experience.

They all touched on a variety of themes. When considering your own attitude towards customer focus and its implications for your organisation, their views may provide some useful indicators for what should be on your agenda.

# Who we talked to: nine leaders in pursuit of customer focus



**Lord Victor Adebowale**

Chief Executive, Turning Point

*“Turning Point is a social care and health social enterprise deriving over 90% of its income from contracts with commissioners. We are a not-for-profit organisation employing about 2,000 staff, and working with around 130,000 clients. We use the term clients deliberately – they are users of our professional services.*

*Most of our clients have complex needs linked to mental health, learning disability, alcohol and drug misuse. The costs to the NHS and the community of them not using our services can be considerable.”*



**Justin Ash**

Managing Director, Lloyds Pharmacy

*“Lloyds Pharmacy operates over some 1,600 pharmacies around the UK. We issue 120 million prescriptions every year, and serve 2 million customers every week. We have 15,000 staff.*

*We are a healthcare organisation with an interface to the NHS and we are a private sector company with a strong sales element in our operations. Our business is characterised by healthcare professionals providing a service to healthcare users.”*



**David Fillingham**

Chief Executive, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust

*“We are a large district general hospital, 800 beds, 3,000 staff, and the biggest A+E receiving centre in the region. We have 100,000 A+E attendances a year, 30,000 by ambulance. It's a very busy hospital with rapid patient turnround.*

*Two years ago the trust was in deficit and missing targets. We've made an excellent start on turning that situation around but we're not claiming huge successes yet. I think it will be a 10-15 year journey to reach where we want to be.”*



**Simon Fowler**

Director of Customer Services, John Lewis Partnership

*"We are a retailer. 26 John Lewis department stores, 183 Waitrose supermarkets, an online and catalogue business, a direct services company, three production units and a farm. Turnover around £6 billion, 7 billion customers, 68,000 permanent staff.*

*Our main point of difference is that we are the UK's largest co-owned business. This means our employees aren't just staff, they are co-owners of the partnership. Together we own the business."*



**Ian Humphries**

Head of Communications, Fujitsu Services

*"We are the IT services arm in Europe of Fujitsu, a global IT company. We employ 21,000 people in the UK and Europe, part of a 150,000 workforce. We design, deliver and operate large IT infrastructures for government organisations and large corporations.*

*At a senior level we talk to chief executive officers, chief information officers, finance and IT directors about how they deploy IT to improve business process, lower costs and increase customer benefits.*

*On a day-to-day level we work within the customer's organisation, supporting end users, running their business applications and managing their datacentres to ensure they meet their customers' needs."*



**Adam Smith**

Director of Transformation, BT Global Services

*"We provide Networked IT and other communications services to multi-site corporate and government customers, including the NHS."*



**Nikki Richardson**

Deputy Chief Executive, South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

*"We are a mental health and learning disabilities trust, with Foundation status since 2006, providing services to South Essex, plus forensic services across the whole county. We employ approximately 2,000 staff, and have 9,300 local members.*

*We encourage a wide membership because it provides a platform to get mental health higher on the agenda for the local community."*



**Tom Strauss**

President and Chief Executive Officer, Summa Health System

*"We serve more than 500,000 patients every year in emergency, acute, critical, outpatient and long-term/homecare settings. Our resources include three general hospitals with a total of 1,200 beds, and six health centres in neighbouring communities. We have more than 6,000 employees and are based in Akron, Ohio, USA."*



**Alwen Williams**

Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets PCT

*"We are a PCT in inner East London: a commissioning organisation with a large direct provider arm. Tower Hamlets is the fastest-growing borough in London, probably in the country. Over 50% of residents are from BME groups, by far the biggest of which is Bangladeshi. The community faces major problems of deprivation and health inequalities. Language is a particular difficulty, with high rates of illiteracy in English and home languages."*

# Customer focus

***“You have to think about what the customer is thinking: “How was it for me? Good? Bad? Or indifferent?”***

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

Customer focus begins with a concern for how the customer experiences the organisation. Time after time, interviewees emphasised the importance of seeing things from the customer's point of view.

***It's about everything we do: delivering value and satisfying our customers. You have to measure your own performance in the eyes of your customer. It's pointless to look at internal measures. You have to think about what the customer is thinking: “How was it for me? Good? Bad? Or indifferent?”***

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

For health service providers, this means looking beyond the outcomes of care to the experience itself. They are adding a new perspective to how their performance as an organisation is judged.

***It's hard to define and hard to measure. There are two elements: The patient's experience: “What did it feel like? How was I treated?” The outcome: “Did I get better? Did something go wrong?” They are connected but separate. The question is how we achieve both. In the past we have expected patients to be grateful and satisfied with the care they got. Now that's changed.***

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

***Quality and safety of care have always been paramount in what we do. Now, without taking our eye off those two things, we have added the customer experience as a third key component of our service.***

*Tom Strauss, Summa Health System*

***Providing health services requires a personal interaction and the establishment of trust. Customers must feel that they have been treated with respect and as individuals. This is how customer focus feels.***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

It isn't only healthcare providers who feel the need to move on from a supply-driven picture of their value as a business. For IT systems companies too there has been a change in what customers expect, possibly paralleling a change in attitudes to healthcare.

***When we were breaking new ground with technology, customers had to take on trust that what we were doing was right for them. Customers themselves were often not clear about what they wanted from this new technology.***

***Now that has turned round. We need to start with customers by understanding what it is they want to achieve for their organisation, and designing the most appropriate solutions for them.***

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

But for healthcare providers there are special considerations around adopting a customer focus. As Alwen Williams points out, “we need to be aware that people often need our services at very vulnerable times in their lives. Their experience of treatment and care will be critical to them and to their whole family.”

The interaction between provider and customer is typically of a different order to an in-store purchase, with consequences that can be much longer term and more important for the user. Yet this doesn't change the value of considering the experience from the patient/customer's own point of view.

*We have looked at the whole patient journey from admission to discharge and beyond. Unit by unit we are looking at what happens to patients as they move through the experience. Teams get the chance to reflect together on what they do and how they do it. And what they can do to improve the patient experience.*

*In elective trauma, the process has been followed by a 36% drop in the mortality rate. In orthopaedics, all hip and knee replacement patients now receive a short guide that talks them through the timetable for recovery after surgery. It shows them what to expect, reassures, and helps their family plan for going home.*

*You could say that the drop in mortality rate is more important than the guide, but the elective hip patient isn't the one in the trauma ward. He or she has their own hopes and fears to come to terms with.*

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

*As an example, we now have a policy of giving users and their carers influence over what happens at a time of crisis. Many users have a pattern where they are relatively well for long periods but will sporadically suffer a crisis. We discuss with them while they are well what their wishes are for treatment during a crisis. These wishes are set out on paper and signed*

*by user, carer and clinician. It becomes part of the discussion as care plans are developed. Our message is that customer service is a priority for our organisation, and we are committed to it. The pay-off comes in greater success in user care, fewer complaints, and better health outcomes in the longer term.*

*Nikki Richardson, South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust*

Interviewees from within and outside the health sector point out that, on a day-to-day level, customer focus can mean different things to different people within the organisation. Behind the front line, staff are often working with colleagues rather than directly with customers. So it's important that everyone in the team is aware of how their own performance influences the experience of the customer.

For healthcare providers, a clearer customer focus, with all that this implies for the relationship between service and user, has one more important dividend: a closer engagement by the 'customer' with the service he or she experiences.

*The point is that as people become more aware of us and our services, they become more engaged in how the services are provided and run. So the process of customer focus starts to be self-fulfilling.*

*Alwen Williams, Tower Hamlets PCT*

# Adopting values

***“Adopting values means staff know the right things to do in situations they haven't encountered before, where there are no rules to follow.”***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

The process of defining the values of an organisation and embedding these into everyday activity is seen as critical to achieving customer focus. Simultaneously, it provides people within the organisation with a sense of its aims and their role, while also creating the framework for the customer experience of the organisation.

For each of the organisations, customer service lies at the heart of their activity, but the core values they have adopted go beyond this primary aim.

The John Lewis Partnership, as a co-owned business, gives prominence to the interests of its partners:

***The partnership's ultimate purpose is the happiness of all its members through their worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business. Because the partnership is owned in trust for its members, they share the responsibilities of ownership as well as its rewards – profit, knowledge and power.***

***Our customer focus begins with our focus on partners. You can't begin to get customer focus right without their engagement.***

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

In common with most other organisations, Bolton NHS Trust has responsibility to a wider group of stakeholders. It decided that agreeing a set of core values was the essential first step towards achieving greater customer focus. The process involved both staff and patients.

**In consultation with staff groups and patient forums we framed a set of four specific aims for our organisation:**

- the improved health of the community
- providing the best possible care
- joy and pride for our staff
- value for taxpayer's money.

***We stress these are the all-important aims of our organisation. Staff love it. They hate targets, strategies and plans. I hear them now adopting the language we use in describing this vision.***

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

Every organisation stressed the importance of involving staff closely in the selection of values, and choosing values that they could easily relate to their day-to-day experience of work. The challenge lies not in thinking up values people might like to adopt, but refining these to just a few core values, exploring their implications for staff and the organisation, and winning their endorsement.

*The first stage was to involve our staff in achieving consensus about our values. You can't work on values in a vacuum and we recognise that our pharmacists know more about pharmacy than our board does. The second stage was to define these agreed values, clearly and simply, then stick to them. Adopting clear values means everyone knows the right things to do even in situations they haven't encountered before, and where there are no rules to follow.*

*The next step is to live the values so that they become part of everyday activity. For example, we agreed on challenging as a value. It legitimises our staff not only in questioning the way we do things as a business, but in having the confidence to talk to customers about their healthcare purchases to ensure they're making the right, informed choices.*

*Finally, we tried to make sure that our business processes didn't interfere with living our values. Staff can do more when they have more time liberated from tasks that used to get in the way. As you build the values and culture, you reach a point of momentum where people know that what they want to do instinctively is what they should do. So everyone feels confident to do more.*

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

*Overall you have to try and involve people in the process. We don't want people to feel that something has been 'done' to them. They must feel involved in the decision-making.*

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

*Be clear about your objectives and desired 'end state', and work towards getting change initiatives embedded everywhere across the business. Ideally have a change leader in each part of the business, close to the people you are trying to reach.*

*We have a statement of what we're trying to achieve encapsulated on a single poster (we call it the big picture) that can be used by line managers in briefing meetings to explain and discuss what's going on. It then becomes an interactive process within each team talking about 'what does this mean for us?'*

*The danger is to go too broad and shallow, rather than narrow and deep. If you start issuing too much information, people turn off. Keep it clear, keep it simple.*

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

# Alignment

***“See your organisation through the eyes of your customers, and match this to your organisation's vision of itself. Then you can spot the gaps between the two.”***

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

Alignment begs fundamental questions about how an organisation's structure and operating processes match the needs of its customers. This may involve reviewing systems that have developed over time for their own functional convenience, and replacing or modifying them with systems designed around the customer.

Interviewees talk about keeping the service delivery system simple and direct; and ensuring that everyone involved in the supply chain understands the importance of their own contribution. For some, alignment has involved major structural change in the way their organisation is structured. For all, the process involves testing which activities are really important against the criteria of customer focus. It also involves looking hard at the different elements that can enhance or diminish the customer experience: How long is the queue? Is the waiting room comfortable? How many rings before someone answers the phone?

***You have to see your organisation through the eyes of your customers, and match this to the organisation's vision of itself. Then you can spot the gaps between the two. You have to recognise that gaps do exist and that you need effective arrangements to put them right. What matters is the way you sort it out.***

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

*We had to get better at aligning ourselves with our customers, to develop ways of working where there were fewer dots to join so we could do a better job of keeping them joined. We needed individuals to see clearly what part each was playing in the supply chain of products and services to our customers.*

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

***We have reorganised our business into customer-centric, sector-based teams. And from the top down we have set customer satisfaction targets that apply across all of BT Group.***

*We asked ourselves: Where are we? What do we think best in class is? Are we number one? We want to be the company that any organisation will call first when they encounter a business problem that they need help with. The strategic direction and 'change agenda' comes from the top of the company and feeds into everything we do.*

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

***You have to use your human capital to best effect. We freed up time spent by staff on checking-in goods to each store. Our figures showed that delivery accuracy was within 1%, while staff could be spending 10% of their working week doing the check. It was more valuable to us that the time be spent on serving customers.***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

For the organisations engaged in healthcare provision, alignment has a specifically local dimension – a responsibility not only to those who beat a path to its door but to the wider community. For these organisations, how they connect with local people becomes a question for constant review. To identify unmet needs and anticipate changing patterns of use is key to how they set up their services.

*To be effective as a commissioning body we have to be connected with the local population. In our case, surveys don't work very well because of language and literacy problems. We also need to be sure that we aren't just talking to the people who want to talk to us.*

*So we engage with mosques, women's groups, and other community groups. Our Patient and Public Involvement function works closely with local area partnerships, it goes out and listens.*

*A prime example is GP services. After the new GP contract, access to appointments outside normal working hours became much more limited. It was a complaint we were hearing day after day. I felt that if we didn't sort this out then we would lose credibility on everything else we do.*

*So we began a dialogue with local GP providers. We involved them in discussions with community groups and other front line staff, and redesigned local contracts to encourage greater flexibility. As a result there is now much more availability of evening and weekend appointments.*

*Alwen Williams, Tower Hamlets PCT*

*It's too easy to make assumptions about what is in people's best interests. There has to be dialogue. Honest communication means listening to what people are actually saying, and achieving a wider understanding. It also means that user expectations can be tempered by what's achievable. Often, something entirely new grows out of this dialogue.*

*Because we have foundation status our board of governors, which includes users and carers, is a powerful force. It ensures we don't become complacent. As expectations change, they have a say and we have to adapt to their expectations.*

*Services have to reflect local needs, so delivery adapts to local conditions. Local services can develop in different ways within a broad framework of clinical standards and protocols.*

*Nikki Richardson, South Essex Partnership Foundation Trust*

*Our clients have become more discerning and we realise that they have complex needs. Our services have to respond to that. Connecting different aspects of care and to local communities is crucial. The process works from the specific to the general, from the individual to the system, not the other way around.*

*As new ideas emerge, we design the service, test it and, if it works, try to replicate it across our organisation.*

*Lord Victor Adebawale, Turning Point*

# People

***“Too many staff still look at patients and think ‘I’m here to save your ass, not kiss it’.”***

*Tom Strauss, Summa Health System*

Whenever a customer focus policy is developed, its success depends totally on the awareness, attitude and 'buy-in' of staff. For some of the interviewees, staff are seen as important reporters of the customer experience whose observations and suggestions will contribute to improvements in service delivery. Everyone agreed that it was essential that staff were fully committed to the organisation's customer focus programme.

Among existing staff, organisations have gone to great lengths to involve staff in decision-making around customer focus, and to incorporate customer awareness into regular training programmes. For new staff, it is a central element of their induction programme. Importantly, most of these organisations have also embedded customer focus into job descriptions and annual performance reviews.

Healthcare organisations observed that for their own staff the shift in attitude from 'treating a patient' to 'serving a customer' could be a difficult transition. Among those we spoke to were Summa Health System in the US, who had taken the most direct policy towards confronting this problem, including quite detailed scripting of various elements of the staff-patient interaction. UK providers and other organisations have shied away from such prescriptive measures, preferring to rely on frequent coaching and the instinctive desire to serve among their staff.

*As part of our customer focus programme, there have been meetings involving all our employees. They are led by a trainer who is herself a former ER nurse. She sums up the problem like this: too many staff still look at patients and think “I’m here to save your ass, not kiss it”. She knows. She used to think that way too. This is important. We have to get past this attitude before we can really talk about customer service.*

*Getting staff fully engaged in this objective is essential. It's something that most staff want to do. It's our job to give them the tools to do it and remove the obstacles that stand in its way. We also have to be aware that sometimes although staff mean well, the interaction can have a different effect on the patient.*

*We have scripted quite closely some areas of the customer-staff interaction: coaching on things like eye contact and touch. “Is there anything else I can do for you?” is a question that our staff must ask towards the end of each encounter. It underlines the sense that we care about their well-being and have time to do more for them.*

*We also produce customer service toolboxes for teams to use with patients. They cover a range of small but important things that can enhance the customer experience. For example, they include thank you cards that both patients and staff can use.*

*We have to be aware that one member of staff can undo the good work of many when it comes to customer satisfaction. So we're strict on accountability, identifying any bad apples, and taking steps to correct the situation.*

*We have independent annual surveys of physician and employee satisfaction, in which our rating is now in the above-75% quartile. We are rated as one of the best places to work in North East Ohio.*

*Tom Strauss, Summa Health System*

*Constant coaching and development of our partners is central. Every partner will have at least one coaching development session every month with his or her manager. These take place on the shop floor: designed to be positive, non-confrontational, immediate and relevant.*

*If there has been a problem, feedback should be immediate. Otherwise people have moved on and the incident is half forgotten.*

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

*The challenge in the change towards customer focus is to make sure people don't get offended by the process or the key issues. It's getting them to see that customer focus is everybody's problem: one organisation serving the customer, not separate little entities.*

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

*I kick off the induction programme for new starters every Monday morning by talking of my own experience as a user of the NHS and asking staff to share theirs. Staff need to see things through the customer's eyes: don't put the uniform on and forget what it's like to be a patient.*

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

Just as customer focus is a response to rising expectations among customers, the process also has implications for the work expectations of staff themselves. Several organisations report that their customer focus programme has given staff greater confidence and increased ability to respond to new pressures. The process has resulted in staff feeling more positive about their work.

*There's a psychological contract between an organisation and its employees in which the organisation either does or doesn't allow staff to find fulfilment at work. People are more demanding now about that contract. It's OK for them to be passionate but that's not enough. All our staff go through an induction programme where the core values of our organisation are explored: openness, driven by serving our clients. Then our performance management system rewards continuing professional development. We give staff freedom to innovate and focus on outcomes for clients.*

*Lord Victor Adebawale, Turning Point*

*Our principles and focus haven't changed but the practice of partner involvement has increased in recent years as we've responded to change driven by growth of our stores, longer opening hours and Sunday trading. What we found was that partners were happy to take on greater levels of empowerment. They were saying "I'm clear about the vision for our business and what we're trying to do. Let me make the decisions that will take this forward."*

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

The absolute value of staff engagement in the process can be summed up in one comment:

*If all our 21,000 staff make the right small steps towards improving the customer experience of our business then the cumulative effect will be huge. It is about all the small steps that help to eliminate a problem or improve a service. We encourage our people to be realistic in the commitments they make to their colleagues and customers – to communicate openly and honestly when they can see ways to improve a service.*

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

# Leadership

***“Leadership is what happens when you're not in the room.”***

*Lord Victor Adebowale, Turning Point*

As leaders themselves, the people we talked to identified a particular paradox about leadership and customer focus. Firstly, leaders of the organisation have to be committed to the idea of customer focus in order for it to happen. Secondly, day-to-day leaders can be quite far removed from the front line where customer service is delivered. Finding ways of dealing with this paradox was a priority for leaders in developing their customer focus programmes.

Some made the point that they do have experience as customers as well as leaders, and that they use this personal experience to test the policies they develop. But all made the point that the people who know customers best are the staff who deal with them. So leadership in this context becomes more a matter of encouraging and enabling staff to serve their customers well.

***With a top-down command and control system you restrict front line people from making the decisions they want to make. So we have changed the way we manage people: it's more about giving people leadership than telling them what to do in any given situation.***

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

***Recognise that as a chief executive officer you don't meet many customers compared to your front line staff. So your staff have to be involved in designing a customer focus. There are no clockwork mechanisms you can set up. And it's a continuing journey. You can never declare victory in achieving customer focus.***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

***I think about clients all the time. But it's not me who delivers the care, it's our front line staff.***

*Lord Victor Adebowale, Turning Point*

A direct consequence of this paradox is that leaders must be visible to staff. Their presence should signal the commitment to customer service but, as importantly, provide opportunities for staff to express their own ideas. Here, very often, is where leaders will hear the things they need to know to take customer focus forward. And their presence should give staff the confidence to act on their own initiative in line with the customer focus values that have been developed.

***Never underestimate the importance of being there: getting out and meeting your staff. It's important to listen, not tell, as staff know the answers. But be clear about what you want as a leader, so your staff can judge you on that.***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

***As a leader I have to respect and promote our work culture: represent the values of the organisation. Staff need to know who I am and how they can get to me. I spend a lot of time visiting our units and services, not to make appearances but to listen and learn. It's about trusting staff. Leadership is about what happens when you're not in the room.***

*Lord Victor Adebowale, Turning Point*

***We have a 'back to the floor' programme in which everyone in a senior management position regularly goes out to the front line for a day, working with staff to identify problems they face and start to develop solutions. The killer combination in customer focus is top down and bottom up: leadership from the top allied with energy and ideas from the front line.***

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

At the same time as having a clear and strong lead from the top, our interviewees pointed out the importance of managers further down the organisation taking the lead on initiatives within their own sphere of influence.

*Shared leadership is the driving force. I and my board can take the lead in identifying problems and priorities, but it's essential that staff at all levels feel they can grasp the nettle to improve services and the patient experience.*

*We have had very low take-up of dental services in Tower Hamlets, even though dentists are available. Our head of dental services and her own team developed a programme to improve take-up, by taking services to people rather than people having to make appointments and come into dental surgeries. She designed the plan with local dentists, so it's not a parallel or competing service. They're involved. First one, then two, now three mobile surgeries go out to housing estates and shopping centres offering care. People come in and, based on their experience, take on the idea of regular dental care at local surgeries.*

*There was a cost which the board had to approve, but the proposal came from the service itself.*

*Alwen Williams, Tower Hamlets PCT*

There's a balancing act for leaders to perform. To enable and encourage initiatives among staff in line with the aims and values of the organisation, yet to also monitor outcomes against the criteria of customer focus and respond appropriately. This balancing act is made easier where leaders themselves are committed clearly and wholeheartedly to their values of customer focus.

*It's important that the board do intervene and take action where there are concerns and things are not going so well. But staff can see the value of that, as long as it's said directly. Key leaders have to be visible and known to staff if they are to feel connected to the process of service improvement.*

*Nikki Richardson, South Essex Partnership Foundation Trust*

*As leader of the organisation, I contribute in three ways:*

- *visible personal commitment – people set store by what I say and do*
- *as the chief architect of the way the organisation is designed*
- *checking whether our objectives are being achieved and looking for further ways to improve.*

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

# Measurement

***“Relying on complaints is not a good indicator for measuring progress. It tells you about who complained but not about who didn't.”***

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

Organisations use a range of techniques to measure the outcome of customer focus. In the private sector, levels of sales provide only a crude yardstick of progress and can, in some circumstances, mask underlying problems that may emerge further down the track. Similarly in healthcare organisations, number of procedures, prescriptions, or patients treated provides only a tangential measure of the customer experience.

All organisations treated complaints seriously. They were seen as useful indicators of problem areas and an important learning aid for staff and organisations. However, none of the organisations relied on complaints alone as a measure for customer focus.

***Just relying on complaints is not a good indicator for measuring progress. It tells you about who complained but not about who didn't. The National Patient Survey gives a better picture, but only in a general way.***

***We're looking to see how we can capture softer feedback from patients. For example, we've talked to Marriott Hotels to see how they track guest satisfaction. It's appropriate to associate how you're treated in hospital with staying at a hotel.***

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

Within their organisations, compliments were also acknowledged and shared among teams as a matter of course.

For a more true measure of their perception by customers, a number of organisations used rolling surveys. These are usually conducted by a research company external to the organisation, which is important in getting impartial results. These survey results are shared widely within the organisation, and are available online to managers and staff within a matter of hours.

***We continuously survey random samples of in- and outpatients. The surveys are conducted by an external research company. The results are available immediately online to our department managers. If necessary, we can drill down into particular sets of results to find out more about what's going on.***

*Tom Strauss, Summa Health System*

***Customer satisfaction is tracked by third party surveys, subject to audit. The results are openly available to staff on our intranet, and they feature on the agenda of all board meetings.***

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

Staff surveys and feedback are also seen as an important indicator in organisations where staff are fully engaged in the customer focus programme. These should confirm the information gathered from customer surveys. Any points of difference become areas for further examination.

*We get constant internal feedback from our partners about their perception of customers' experience. We also get regular customer feedback that tells us broadly similar things. We're working now on getting greater granularity to this feedback so we can match staffing levels more precisely to customer needs.*

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

*We have a third party company conduct regular interviews with our top 150 customers. Customers are asked for their views on the quality of the service we provide and the relationship we have. We use this information to build in continuous improvements to the service and to the relationship. We also undertake regular online staff surveys, 250 at a time, to get feedback and take the pulse of how staff are feeling.*

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

Among NHS trusts a range of information sources were looked to: their own patient and staff surveys, the National Patient Survey, and feedback from local patient and community groups.

*Our patient survey results provide direction with feedback on users' and carers' experience of the pathway from entry to outcome.*

*We have a very active Patient Advice Liaison service (PALS), and a system for communicating complaints and compliments within the organisation so we can learn from them.*

*Nikki Richardson, South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust*

There was a general consensus that measurement of customer satisfaction is not an exact science, nor an especially complex activity. Almost all had a policy of having very few measures but being very clear about the importance of those they had chosen.

*We used to have 28 different performance indicators for our business. Now we have just four. You can't measure your way to customer focus, but you can track progress with a few key numbers. It means you have to make choices about what you measure and be very clear with your staff about why these measures matter.*

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

*Our key business performance measures are partner satisfaction, customer satisfaction and profit outcome. In our co-ownership model they form a virtuous circle.*

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

# Cost and reward

***“The most important reward is that people feel good about what they're doing, and happy to be part of the organisation they're working for.”***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

For all of the organisations, the cost of implementing customer focus programmes and providing rewards for staff was not seen as significant. All talked of the effort required to develop and implement the programme, but did not perceive it as expensive.

***At the start of the Reputation programme we had to take on board that it would mean taking our 21,000 staff out of the business for one hour, four times a year. In several countries we decided that we had to do this because the issue was so important. We did make contingency plans to fund out-of-hours meetings, but in fact the programme has fitted within existing team meetings.***

*Ian Humphries, Fujitsu Services*

For organisations with bonus schemes for staff, customer focus has changed the basis of the bonus calculation rather than actually added to it.

***Our bonus system now is based on a combination of commercial targets and customer satisfaction targets. Annual profit figures are not enough. Customer satisfaction builds a longer-term view of the relationship. It ensures that people deliver on the promises they make to customers.***

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

Some interviewees also reported cost-neutral and even cost-reducing initiatives, generated by a clearer focus among teams on the customer experience.

***Our physiotherapy service has recently redesigned its appointments system with the aim of cutting waiting times from weeks or months to virtually zero. It was entirely done by the staff themselves. As a result, the physios and admin staff are much happier about their work, and their patients are happier too.***

***That cost us nothing at all. It happened because people reflected on what they were doing and felt empowered to do something to improve things.***

*Alwen Williams, Tower Hamlets PCT*

In terms of rewards for staff, interviewees reported that increased job satisfaction was more motivating than financial gain. The point was made repeatedly.

***The most important reward for staff is that they feel good about what they're doing, and feel happy to be part of the organisation they're working for.***

***If you have staff who instinctively want to help people and you're enabling them to do that, that's the day-to-day motivation they most need.***

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

***Responsibility is what motivates people. If you give people responsibility, that gives them huge motivation. The energy of people when they're redesigning their own ways of working is tangible.***

*David Fillingham, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust*

Most of the organisations had in place a variety of mechanisms to identify and congratulate staff who merited particular recognition for their achievements in customer service. Most of these rely on suggestions from colleagues and customers, and some can be quite informal. Others invite teams to make their own case for recognition.

*We stage an annual quality awards evening which is incredibly motivating for staff. They get the chance to stand up and tell their peers what they've been doing. Most are very nervous at the prospect, but get a huge buzz when they do it. This year we have added a special award for excellent customer care.*

*Nikki Richardson, South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust*

*We have an annual 'My Customer' challenge cup which people can enter by identifying the problem they saw, describing what they did about it, and showing the result. We make a big deal about it and look to see what we can learn from the winners.*

*Adam Smith, BT Global Services*

*We have a reward and recognition scheme called 'one step beyond' which enables any partner to recognise some outstanding or special individual contribution from a colleague. The spontaneity of this helps enormously with its impact on individuals.*

*Simon Fowler, John Lewis Partnership*

*You have to be very public about recognising when people get it right – within the trust, in the local community, and by entering regional and national awards if they're relevant. This is how good practice spreads.*

*I believe that most, if not all, of our staff come to work every day wanting to do the best for their patients. The fact that a particular success in doing this is clearly recognised is very important to them, and can inspire others to up their game. Some non-recurring cost like a re-fit of the staff room doesn't go amiss either.*

*Alwen Williams, Tower Hamlets PCT*

Some make the point that the experience of working well in a customer-focused organisation is not only emotionally satisfying for staff but also increases their professional competence and value.

*I think working with us gives staff the opportunity to develop into fully-rounded professionals – perhaps more so than with other social care employers. That gives them greater job satisfaction and increases their value – personally and financially.*

*Lord Victor Adebawale, Turning Point*

But there was a word of warning from some of the leaders about the hidden cost of the substantial change that may be needed to shift an organisation and staff towards a greater customer focus. They emphasise the need to get the programme right from the very start, and follow it through with leadership from the top.

*I would say that a change process like this is very absorbing for an organisation. Energy does go into change that could be going to customers. So you have to get it right. I wouldn't want to start another cycle of major change like this for at least another three or four years.*

*Justin Ash, Lloyds Pharmacy*

# Conclusions

Customer focus is about doing everything possible to make the patient's experience as pleasant, straightforward and unstressful as possible. High satisfaction ratings in patient surveys show that NHS providers are already doing well in this area. But there is always more that can be done. As expectations continue to rise, customer focus becomes a crucial factor in delivering high-quality healthcare and winning greater recognition for this through word of mouth among the wider public.

The consensus of the interviewees is:

- leadership and commitment to customer focus at the highest level are essential
- the process demands careful and wide consultation with staff and customer/patient groups
- a short, simple set of values, agreed with all stakeholders, provides a strong platform for improving customer focus
- the process will only work with 'buy-in' from all staff, who should feel empowered to take their own initiative
- measures of progress may vary, but must be few and well-defined and be related closely to issues that are important to customers and staff
- the motivation for staff is to find greater fulfilment in their work.

Perhaps the most striking point about all the approaches is that customer focus means giving staff and systems a great deal of attention as well.

Staff are also customers of internal parts of the system and the same care needs to be extended to them too as well as more traditional customers.

For example, not providing the case notes for outpatients does not just inconvenience the patient – it lets the clinician down and sends a message that their work is not valued.

Staff have a key role in collecting information and insight on users' experience and in redesigning systems to ensure that they are customer focused. Staff selection, induction and involvement are all crucial in delivering results.

Many of these features require further development in the NHS, in particular:

- being explicit about what is required, why it is important and how this links to the organisation's values and objectives
- rigorous systems to collect and act on information and to provide the basis for challenge from boards and leaders to the rest of the organisation are clearly a priority
- curiosity about what is actually happening to customers and staff
- willingness to challenge unacceptable behaviours and entrenched practices
- ability to pursue the approaches over the long term.

This report shows that there is a great deal of good practice that can be learnt from both in the NHS and elsewhere, and while patients are not quite the same as customers, there is sufficient similarity for many of the lessons to be transferable.

### **Further Information**

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*Great expectations: What does customer focus mean for the NHS?* forms part of the NHS Confederation's work on the reputation of the NHS. The series of work addresses some of the most controversial issues facing the health services, looks at some of the key reputation drivers for the NHS and supports the work of NHS Confederation members.

For more information, visit [\*\*www.nhsconfed.org/confidence\*\*](http://www.nhsconfed.org/confidence)

For more information about this report or the series, please contact Anna Scott-Marshall, Campaigns Manager on 020 7074 3303 or email [\*\*anna.scott-marshall@nhsconfed.org\*\*](mailto:anna.scott-marshall@nhsconfed.org)

# Great expectations

It can be argued that there's a fundamental difference between a patient in an NHS hospital, or someone visiting their GP, and the customer in a shop or hotel. But looked at from the patient's point of view, the experiences have much in common. The NHS patient is the same person who goes shopping and stays in hotels. Why should they, at the hospital door, leave their expectations to be treated as well as by any other organisation keen to have their custom?

This report examines what establishing a customer focus means for the NHS and draws on the experience from nine organisation leaders, from both outside and inside the NHS, who can talk about customer focus with some authority. *Great expectations* provides some themes that should be useful for NHS organisations thinking about this agenda.

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