The Service Pledge for Breast Cancer: Improving services through patient involvement

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Background

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, with more than 48,000 women being diagnosed each year. Patient and healthcare professional feedback collected by Breakthrough has shown a need for service improvement in some areas. Many felt that this could be best achieved through partnership between patients and their healthcare professionals. With such an important emotional need, Breakthrough developed our Service Pledge for Breast Cancer, designed to enable healthcare professionals and patients to work together to improve local breast services.

There is evidence that meaningful patient involvement and engagement of people in their own care supports relationships with NHS professionals, and improves the quality and experience of healthcare.2,3

Methods

Breakthrough works closely with hospitals to develop their own Service Pledge booklet containing short, medium and long-term improvement goals for the hospital. This is given to newly diagnosed patients. At each hospital a member of the breast care team (often the Breast Care Nurse) takes on the role of Pledge Lead to co-ordinate the Service Pledge activities.

Service Pledge booklets provided to all newly diagnosed patients

Service Pledge booklet development

Development of realistic improvement goals, tailored to the needs of the individual hospital and its patients

Evaluation and methodology refinement

Development of in-depth patient surveys for new Pledge Sites

Feedback report presented to MDT

Collation and review of patient and staff feedback

Face-to-face patient interviews held

Survey responses and patient interview/rep applications received

Patient and staff surveys sent out

Patient engagement

User involvement

Service evaluation

Partnership working

Results

Local improvement goals provide tangible actions from patient involvement. For example:

- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Hospital set up a patient buddy system
- Pilgrim Hospital set up their own dedicated breast unit
- Ipswich Hospital provided tailored information for men with breast cancer

The Service Pledge has proven to be very successful in driving local service improvement. Although financial constraints and large workloads for nurses are cited as possible limitations, the Service Pledge can help hospitals encourage an environment of user involvement and patient engagement to improve patient experience.

Conclusions

Healthcare professionals involved have reported patient views are a powerful tool for securing change.

“Our breast team has realised the value of working together with patients. What we consider to be small changes can make the biggest difference to our patients.”

Jo Divver
Breast Care Nurse Specialist, Lincoln County Hospital

Breakthrough is committed to exploring opportunities to adapt this model across and beyond cancer services, and is working with Breast Cancer Care to explore a Service Pledge for Secondary Breast Cancer to enable people with metastatic disease to help shape future breast care services.

References

2 Coulter A Engaging patients in their healthcare: how is the UK doing relative to other countries. Available at: Picker Institute pickereurope.org/Filestore/PIE_reports/project_reports/Six-country-study-6-4-06-web-version.pdf: 2006;

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