

People Participation at East London NHS Foundation Trust

“If I were a governor reading this, I would ask myself what I could do.” It is the governor’s duty to represent the public voice, to effectively challenge the board and to question whether the trust is meeting the needs of the community they look after.

People participation at East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT) is uniquely positioned to give service users a voice and to ensure that this voice is represented at the heart of all services. Those with lived experience are actively encouraged to join the conversation, and feel that their views are not only listened to but valued and acted upon. ELFT feel that this model should be the norm at every other trust and encourage other trusts to consider implementing a version of the patient participation scheme that works for its service users.

ELFT is a combined Mental Health / Learning Disability and Community Trust that looks after four London boroughs (City of London, Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets) where it provides services to a population of 820,000 people. As of 2015, it broadened its geographical footprint to include Bedfordshire and Luton, thereby serving a further population of 630,000.

Since the patient and service user voice has a different route into the trust, the Council of Governors can focus on representing the public and member voice. This also helps to not split the conversation, but rather to join it together. Rather than having to recruit for specific service user or patient governors, ELFT have open applications to anyone who wants to join. They believe this leads to more open and honest conversations between the Council of Governors, service users and the board.

To ELFT People participation means service users engage with the trust in plenty of non-traditional ways, to ensure that all aspects of the service are designed with service users in mind. ELFT has had service users involved in the procurement of both a taxi service and a new payroll system. The complaints team benefits from a service user who helps write responses. It’s non-traditional, but it brings people together. This inclusive environment fosters genuine appreciation of the service user voice.

The key to the diversity is directly challenging the board, in addition to having local people from different backgrounds and experiences give their views. This is why it is so important that the Council of Governors reflects the member voice and engages with the community around them.

By its own admission, ELFT understands that measuring outcomes of the benefits for service users is hard to do. They acknowledge that outcomes are more person-centred than can be easily captured by traditional outcome measures. In particular, their focus is on ensuring that all future service users have better experiences.

To external bodies, the impact is clear. The Care Quality Commission has rated ELFT 'Outstanding' and makes particular mention in their report that "people participation was at the centre of the trusts work". Above all, the CQC feels that governors feel valued and supported to hold non-executive directors to account and those in the people participation scheme feel that those on the Council of Governors really do listen.

ELFT's advice to other trusts is to start with the patients, to listen to what service users themselves are interested in and how they think the system as a whole can be improved.

Benefits of the scheme stretch beyond the trust itself. Service users deliver training to external agencies in the surrounding community, raising awareness of mental health and suicide to the Metropolitan Police and the Docklands Light Railway (DLR). One key external agency that ELFT work with is the Job Centre. Previously, those with mental health issues have faced some difficulties because those who work in the Job Centre may have little awareness or understanding of mental health. This training has helped break down barriers, reduce stigma and makes for more effective working relationships.

The NHS has limited resources and time, and one way of dealing with this is to ensure that the surrounding community has the necessary skills to help service users in their day-to-day lives. This approach encourages moving away from working in silos towards integration within and outside their trust and ELFT realise the value inclusivity has. It's not perfect yet, but they are having the challenging conversations and asking the difficult questions and this is how they are moving forward all to the benefit of the service user.

With thanks to those from the People Participation scheme at ELFT, Fiona, Paul and service users, Asha and Sidney, who kindly answered all of my questions.

For any further information on the People Participation scheme, please contact Norbert Lieckfeldt, Corporate Governance Manager at ELFT, via norbert.lieckfeldt@nhs.net

Further Reading:

- https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/new_reports/AAAH2485.pdf