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Keeping CSCI at bay



The Commission for Social Care Inspection's (CSCI) new inspection regime for adult care services means that regularity of inspections is determined by service user feedback. Managers may need to supply evidence and examples that their service meets the needs of their users. Irving Stackpole explains how and why service user feedback should be sought.

The way CSCI inspects services has changed. They can now inspect any adult social care service at any time, as long as every service is inspected at least once in three years. They will undertake one key inspection and then decide how often they need to inspect in future. Inspections could be triggered by complaints at anytime if they suspect providers are not delivering a quality service.

Around Autumn 2006 CSCI will introduce a legal requirement for registered providers to produce an Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA). CSCI are still developing this but it is likely to have two parts. The first is an 'annual data and information' section. This will ask for basic information on who uses the service, who works for the service and how it is run.

The second part is a 'quality assurance assessment', which will ask providers to answer the following points:

- How well, in their estimation, they deliver good outcomes for service providers.
- How they have used the views of service users to shape what they do.
- Where they believe they need to improve the service.
- The action providers are going to take to improve the service.
- How they have responded to previous CSCI recommendations or requirements.

This is likely to be accompanied by

supporting evidence and specific examples of how providers have engaged with people so that they influence their service. The strongest supporting evidence will be feedback from residents and their families to demonstrate that their services meet their needs. Feedback can then be used to shape the services and providers have evidence to back it up.

Why obtain user feedback?

The new CSCI inspection and audit scheme means that seeking and documenting satisfaction with services will become vitally important to satisfy their requirements and reduce the frequency of inspections. The inspection changes provide an opportunity for forward thinking organisations to create a satisfaction measurement system that surpasses the minimum regulatory standards and transforms services offered

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by, and relationships within, that organization. Care user feedback in a variety of forms and channels gives managers and staff critical insights into what is being done right and, importantly, what should be changed. By utilising multiple levels of communication, management delivers the

message to all constituents - service users, their families, staff, commissioners, regulators and local authorities - that feedback, both negative and positive, is valued and acted upon. The direct and indirect costs of instituting a comprehensive feedback system are minor in relation to the cost savings from fewer inspections. The potential benefits for improved services and communications as well as cost savings are only limited by management's commitment to excellence.

Service feedback tools

Management can choose from a mix and match menu of options to collect and analyse feedback. Choosing the mix that works best for an organisation will depend on a number of variables but is influenced by the target group from whom feedback is solicited.

Tools for obtaining feedback can be as

simple as an informal interview or more sophisticated like surveys. Surveys are the workhorse of any feedback system. Distributed annually or semi-annually, surveys can take many forms but are most often hard copy and should be carefully tailored for the targeted audience. Organisations may combine surveys

with focus groups, a hotline, point of service questionnaires, as well as the required complaints procedure.

The regulatory complaints process is the lowest standard required in the health and social care sectors. Using the minimum requirements for a complaints process is a launching point for a complaints and compliments process that can be transformative for service users, families and staff while installing systems within the organisation that can ensure the minimum number of inspections.

A complaints and compliments system creates opportunities for interactions between and allong service users, families, staff and regulatory agencies to pinpoint problem areas as well as areas and individuals demonstrating excellence. It is a point of marketing differentiation from other providers, may contribute to lower risk of litigation and add to employee retention and productivity.

The key to avoiding complaints is to identify them at the source and to address them quickly. Offering a variety of ways to solicit feedback reduces the likelihood that a problem or compliment turns into a complaint.

SUMMARIES OF THE RESULTS AND RELEVANT PARTS OF THE ACTION PLAN SHOULD BE SHARED WITH THE CONSTITUENT GROUPS INVOLVED.

A quick response demonstrates the value of the feedback to the person providing the information and sends a clear message throughout the organisation that management is serious about using the information it collects. The responses should be designed and utilised to extract value from the investment made in the entire feedback monitoring system of which the complaints and compliments process is an integral part.

Effective responses to feedback

There are four characteristics to an effective response system to all feedback including complaints and compliments: prompt, authoritative, follow up and measurement. The speed of response is directly

correlated to satisfaction with the outcome so as soon as a problem surfaces or a compliment is given, the person should immediately receive an 'I am sorry about that' or 'Thank you for. . .'. The person should then be given a clear statement of what will be done next and when, as well as asking the person's permission to take the action. 'I will do ... by the end of the day. Is that alright with you?' or 'I would like to share your compliment with... May I do that?' are appropriate responses to a complaint and compliment. Empower staff to decide the next step and to be responsible for taking that step.

The next point is crucial to the feedback process - do what you say you are going to do and then communicate it back to the person who made the complaint or compliment. Failure to do what you say undermines the nature of the relationship, as well as the feedback monitoring system created for the organisation.

For example, Janet is a housekeeper at a care home. Her manager, Thomas, receives a compliment about Janet from a resident. He tells the resident that he will pass on the compliment to Janet but

then fails to do so. The next time the resident sees Janet, she asks if Thomas told Janet about her excellent work. Janet says that she hasn't had any such conversation with Thomas. Here a compliment has caused damage to the relationship between Janet and her manager, Thomas, so that Janet decides to look for another job and the resident is unhappy with Thomas because he failed to keep his word. Even a positive interaction can go badly wrong if not handled properly.

Clearly Thomas should have told Janet about the compliment and then reported back to the resident that he passed along the information. Janet would be pleased that her manager gave her a compliment and the resident would be satisfied that her good word

was passed along.

The final step in the process is to measure the result. Measurement may happen in a personal interview such as with the resident in the example provided, as well as more generally in a survey question such as 'When I raise a concern, it is always handled effectively'.

Utilising a comprehensive feedback monitoring system including the complaints and compliments process requires that action plans are developed based on the results of all the tools used in the feedback system. Summaries of the results and relevant parts of the action plan should be shared with the constituent groups involved. As the actions are taken and the results of change are apparent, communicate those results to the people who have helped to make your organisation a better place to receive services or to work. Finally, use the results to shape the subsequent feedback methods and questions in your feedback monitoring system.

Reaping the rewards

As complaints and reports of services dropping below standard can trigger inspections, measuring feedback in a variety of ways provides ample opportunities for issues to be identified before they trigger inspections. By implementing an effective response strategy to complaints and compliments, your organisation can reduce the frequency of inspections and build better relationships that contribute to overall satisfaction with services by customers and staff. Challenge your organisation to transform regulatory requirements into standards of excellence to reap the rewards of an effective, integrated satisfaction system and less frequent inspections.

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