

What role can online feedback play during a pandemic?

Unprecedented. How many times now have we all heard this word being bandied about since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. Not since the outbreak of the Spanish Flu in 1919 have we seen a virus have such devastating consequences as it spread worldwide.

While we now have greatly advanced medical equipment, clinical treatments and expertise, staff are experiencing significant challenges working in hospitals and social care during a virus outbreak of catastrophic proportions. While many people are experiencing job loss and economic hardship, those on the coalface are dealing with the direct impacts COVID-19 is having on service users, staff and their service's changing operations, processes, and procedures.

The way services interact with service users has needed to change significantly in a very short period of time. As more is discovered about the virus, changes need to be fluid, staff trained (often on the job) and information disseminated both internally and externally.

Therefore, what role does feedback on service user experience have during these challenging times:

The service user experience has never been more important in informing staff what is working, where the gaps are, what staff training may be needed and if key messages are reaching their audience.

But this is only one half of the story. Staff members within the care sectors could use a confidence-boost now more than ever!

Care Opinion Australia is approaching online feedback from **both angles**. We encourage service users to share stories of gratitude and thanks to help boost staff morale. Care Opinion UK's CEO, Dr James Munro, in an article published in the BMJ Opinion, says:

"This appreciation for care has always been there, but social media and feedback platforms such as Care Opinion and nhs.uk have made it visible to everyone."

and

"We can all be part of fostering trust, understanding and connectedness in the face of the fear and exhaustion that staff and patients are coping with. Yes, covid-19 is extraordinarily contagious: but so is gratitude, so is kindness, so is hope."

With this approach, online feedback is to be embraced. Some comments from Australian authors have made in recent times include:

"...everyone was caring and communicative. All this during the period where COVID 19 was ramping up." <https://www.careopinion.org.au/76134>

"The health department overall did an excellent job considering all the confusion surrounding this pandemic. A special thank you to Amy who communicated with us regularly by phone her manner was

exceptional, she was as helpful as possible and had the utmost respect and dignity.”

<https://www.careopinion.org.au/76186>

“It was a very stressful time, particularly around the COVID issue but the care and professionalism was exceptional.” <https://www.careopinion.org.au/76162>

So, what are you waiting for? Encourage your staff to engage with service users during this stressful time. Learn from their experiences. And we know the excellent work staff are doing; let's get service users to shout about it.

You can read the full article by Dr. James Munro, CEO of Care Opinion UK at

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/03/30/james-munro-in-a-pandemic-does-patient-feedback-still-matter/>

How can Care Opinion support your service throughout this time?

With stringent rules in place governing social distancing measures, the numbers of visitors to care services and facilities is greatly reduced. This reduction in visitors is vital in flattening the curve of coronavirus in Australia and protecting services users, however, it does reduce the opportunities staff have to ask for feedback. It is not currently appropriate to distribute feedback forms and ask service users and their families, carers and friends to use shared devices, such as iPads, to fill out a survey or rate the service received.

The changes to service delivery have been implemented so quickly that pre-existing surveys will unlikely ask the right questions for the situation. We believe it is stories that will provide the rich data needed to evaluate current changes and inform improvements for service delivery, communication and quality experiences.

While surveys and ratings may inform staff if the service is doing well or requires improvement, what they are limited in providing is information about who, what, when, where, why and how.

- **Who** was it that earned that smiley face? Was it a registered nurse who allayed the service user's fears, or the receptionist who went the extra mile with the booking or the kitchen staff who designed a top-notch menu?
- **What** did staff say to earn a 5-star rating in communication? Did they make those extra phone calls when the service user couldn't visit their Mum at the nursing home?
- **When** did the staff not listen to the service user? Was it when they were trying to make an appointment for their baby's vaccinations when they themselves had a cough?



- **Where** can a service user provide honest feedback if they are afraid it will impact on their parent's care? Should they wait until they can see their Mum again when lock-down is lifted?
- **Why** wouldn't a service user recommend your service to their friends? Was it because they didn't get tested for COVID-19 even though they felt they should be eligible for testing?
- **How** did the difficulty in being able to meet with senior staff member impact on the experience of care? Did it exacerbate their fears?

The opportunities to learn from service user experience, inform changes and training, and boost staff morale through encouraging stories are simply too great to miss during this *unprecedented* time.