

Online library of Quality,
Service Improvement
and Redesign tools

Patient stories



Patient stories

What is it?

Stories are told by individuals from their own perspective and in a healthcare setting they can provide us with an opportunity to understand their experience of the care they have received – what was good, what was bad and what could be done to improve their experience.

When to use it?

You can use patient stories to get a better understanding of individuals' experiences and perspectives on a specific issue or service. It is important to recognise that you cannot use individual stories to make generalisations about service user experience but that each story is valid as it represents an individual's experience. You can, however, use stories alongside other data sources to gain powerful insight into what is happening with your service and/or system.

You can also use stories and storytelling to engage your stakeholders and for educational purposes.

How to use it?

When deciding to capture patient stories about their experiences of care, there are some important considerations you must take on board:

- Ensure that your senior team is aware of your intention to capture patient/service user stories and why.
- Ensure your organisation is committed to using the information captured.
- Obtain formal, written consent from participants before you start.
- Provide participants with information about what you are trying to achieve and be explicit about what will actually happen – who will take notes or record the story and what will happen to it afterwards.
- Maintain confidentiality as far as possible.
- Ensure that the person capturing the story is not involved in providing care to the storyteller.

Other things for you to consider to capture quality stories include:

- Be mindful of your personal reactions and how they can influence the storyteller.
- Consider recording the story as it will enable you to focus on the discussion rather than having your attention with taking notes.
- Repeat back or paraphrase what the storyteller has said to you – this will help you to check understanding and clarify anything that isn't clear.
- Don't interrupt – allow your storyteller the space to talk freely.

- Don't rush to fill silences – these pauses in conversation can enable the storyteller to think through or reflect on what they are telling you.
- Allow the time for your storytellers to say all they want to say and prepare questions to elicit their views if they are not immediately forthcoming.
- Listen 'between the lines' and feed back your impressions.

What next?

You may like to read up on [active listening](#) to understand how you can obtain the best stories possible from patients/service users.

Your organisation may have its own policy on the collection and use of patient/service user stories so it may be worth checking as you will then be able to access consent forms, guidance and examples of stories previously captured.