

Friends and Family Test “unreliable” comparison tool says Picker Institute Europe

Newly published research from **Picker Institute Europe** has shown that the controversial **NHS Friends and Family Test** is an unreliable performance management measure – but *can* be useful for improving services.

A combination of the use of varying collection methods and demographic factors (patients’ age and sex) significantly skew the data - making meaningful comparisons between organisations impossible.

The **Picker Institute**, which uses people’s experiences to improve the quality of health and social care for all, shared the analysis in an in-depth study which features in the *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*.

The paper, entitled “*Influence of patients’ age and sex and the mode of administration on results from the NHS Friends and Family Test of patient experience*,” investigates the impact of patients’ age and sex and the way the survey is carried out – eg on paper or comment cards, via kiosks, telephone, or text messages, and so on. It shows significant differences in the way people respond when different methods are used*.

The newly published study joins a growing list of references that have criticised the test’s reliability and validity, undermining hopes that it be recognised as “a national single measure (for) quality of care.”

Of the research findings, Chris Graham, Director of Research & Policy at Picker Institute Europe said; “*The Friends and Family Test was originally intended to be a single measure of healthcare quality: a simple means of assessing and comparing services, allowing patients to make informed choices, and driving improvements. But whilst the widespread roll-out of the test is impressive, our research shows that it does not match these ambitions. The Friends and Family Test simply cannot be used as a reliable performance measure – and nor should patients use scores from the test to choose their hospital. However, our experience and feedback from NHS trusts shows that patient comments collected via the Friends and Family Test are proving useful for identifying improvements locally. We should celebrate this success and focus on making best use of these comments rather than counting recommendations.*”

The Picker Institute’s analysis is published just weeks before NHS England are due to release a review of the controversial Friends and Family Test. This review is expected to be accompanied by revised guidance on the data collection methods used and the purpose of the test in general.

Although the test is flawed as a performance measure and a comparative tool, Picker Institute Europe supports its focus on people’s experiences and argues that it has a different value. When viewed in context of the comments shared, FFT *can* be highly useful for improving services and fuelling discussion about patient experience. It is the use of the score ratings as an indicator of organisational quality and as a performance management measure where the test fails.

For the Friends and Family Test to fulfil its potential, the test’s strengths need to be recognised and it must be liberated from the things it cannot do. In short, the NHS must forget about using the Friends and Family Test for comparisons, and let the front line focus on using the patient comments to improve services and support the delivery of optimum care for all.

Notes to Editors:

*Generally in terms of the mode of administration, online responses were significantly less positive than positive responses, with the mean differences in score being 22.0 points for inpatients (95% confidence interval 27.3 to 16.7) and 18.0 points for emergency department attendees (29.0 to 7.0). Telephone responses were significantly more positive than postcard responses, with a mean difference of 9.2 (1.6 to 16.8) in the emergency department setting.

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