



From the field

Case study: Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

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The eye department at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust underwent an external review by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, UK in January 2017.

The review was commissioned by the Medical Director of the Trust following a series of Never Events within ophthalmology in the preceding 18 months. It was felt at the time that an external review would be a positive step in highlighting areas of weakness as well as providing advice on improvements.

There was a change in leadership structure in July 2016, when a newly appointed clinical director and general manager joined the Trust. It was felt the review would be helpful in providing some direction to the new management team.

The review took place in January 2017. The process was very thorough, with information gathering beforehand and then detailed interviews with relevant members of staff as well as a detailed tour of the department.

Our main concern was the perception that the review would mark us down as a department and would only highlight the weak areas, but this was not true. The review was extremely helpful, in that it highlighted good practice and confirmed that the

changes the new management team had already put in place were taking us in the right direction.

The review also highlighted limitations faced by our department, including issues with the building, IT infrastructure, nursing and admin structures. This aspect of the review results helped us to advocate for support for the changes we needed in order to do better.

For us, it was a very useful exercise as it highlighted good practice, identified areas of improvement, gave us ideas for some innovative developments within the department based on other's experiences and, importantly, gave us external validation that the department was safe and providing a good service, despite the constraints we faced.

Two years on, and we are pleased to say that our structures are better, our department is stronger and better staffed, staff morale is higher and we have not had any Never Events since the original series that triggered the review in the first place.

We would recommend an external review to others. The review sets standards for what we should be doing and to what standard – based on what would be considered normal practice elsewhere – and it does this from an external viewpoint. An external review can be a powerful tool to advocate for, and implement, positive change.

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be worthwhile contacting your department of health, or national professional body or association, to suggest they set up an external review service.

Testimonials from UK hospitals

“The review report highlighted shortcomings within the service and other safety issues. All recommendations taken on board and implemented. No safety or service related problems have since been identified. A well run system is in place with high level of patient satisfaction. Extremely valuable for safe and efficiently running service meeting all national standards for care.”

“The review has been a very useful exercise in terms of getting an external opinion on the service. It has instigated discussion within the team and enabled us to formulate our own action plan to take forward the recommendations. This has coincided with a change in the management team, which has had a positive impact, in terms of enabling change.”

“On behalf of the department, we found the review extremely helpful [...] it highlighted many areas that required increased input with a big emphasis on the development of allied health professional roles;

something we've taken on board [...] finally, we're beginning to see action at a senior level on this, with engagement that we've just not seen before.”

How to provide a review service

For a review to be credible and realistic, a review service must retain its independence, objectivity and impartiality, and it must be open and transparent in all its dealings.²

It is important to develop a framework that sets out how the service will be governed and what processes will be followed. Aspects to consider include data security, training for reviewers, how to generate useful reports, and fees. A review may take anything from two days to more than two weeks, so consider the resources and expenses needed and plan for the costs accordingly.

Who should be on the review team?

It is a privilege and a responsibility to be a member of a review team. In the UK, feedback from reviewers

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