

# The importance of engaging staff and patients in Always Events<sup>®</sup>

**I**n 2016, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust started on a journey to improve how carers are welcomed on to their wards using the Always Event framework. This case study focuses on the challenges and solutions the team experienced with engaging staff and patients.

## How the journey started

The John's Campaign was the inspiration behind the launch of the Always Event at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. John's Campaign was founded in 2014 with the aim to welcome carers of people with dementia in hospital settings (<http://johnscampaign.org.uk/#/>). A survey carried out by trust volunteers on the wards across the organisation showed that 79% of patients said they would like their carer present and 97% of staff felt that having carers present on the ward would make the patient feel safe and relaxed.



A consultation was held in May 2017 which included members of the public, staff, patients and their carers. The discussion focused on flexible visiting for carers of people with dementia including the barriers and potential solutions. It was agreed that welcoming carers of people with dementia, through the use of a 'carers pack' would be piloted in four wards: two Care of the Older Person wards (25 & 26) and two Trauma Orthopaedic wards (34 & 35).



## Challenges with engaging staff

The engagement of frontline staff on the pilot wards with the Always Event was the biggest challenge at the start of the journey. The wards were experiencing staffing pressures and staff found it difficult to be pulled away from their day-to-day work to join meetings about the Always Event work. To move the project forward, the project team's day-to-day leader visited staff on the wards to understand their concerns and identify the barriers to implementation.

From talking with staff on a one-to-one basis it was evident the carers packs were not being used. Some aspects of the pack, such as the charter, were not felt to be useful for welcoming carers and/or other elements required updating. This was felt to be too time consuming and not clear whose responsibility it was to do such updates. Although the packs were not being handed out, all carers that were interviewed in the pilot wards during October 2017 had felt welcomed by staff: they had been offered flexible visiting, felt part of the extended ward team and supported by the staff on the ward to care for their relatives. As the packs were a barrier to staff engagement with the work, and were not seen to add value to welcoming carers, the packs were removed from the wards. It was recognised by Blackpool that when testing change ideas it is important to abandon those which are not reliably implemented by staff.

The importance of building up a good relationship with frontline staff was key to maintaining staff engagement in the Always Event. The carers pack was an idea that originated in the public consultation event and staff felt that these were not necessary in practice and were a hindrance on the ward.



---

**A key learning was that frontline staff need to be involved from the start of an Always Event to ensure that they take ownership of the work alongside patients involved in the co-design.**

---

Listening to staff concerns showed that another barrier to their engagement with the Always Event was that they could not offer flexible visiting to all carers; they did not understand why the changes were only for carers of people living with dementia and not for all carers and felt this was discriminatory. In response, the project team expanded the scope of the Always Event to include all carers of patients admitted to the pilot wards.



### **Achieving staff engagement**

A mix of approaches were used to gather feedback from staff in the pilot wards and to help with their engagement:

- **Informally talking to staff on a one-to-one basis** on the ward so that they were not pulled away from their day-to-day work. In talking with staff, some of the Healthcare Assistants did not feel they had a voice and did not think the project team would listen to their concerns. By showing staff that the project team were keen to listen and act on their feedback, such as removing the carer packs, helped to get their support and engagement with the Always Event.
- **Surveys of staff** were carried out towards the start of the project. The project team asked how staff would prefer to be sent the survey and this was by the trust's intranet. A link to the survey was also made available via a staff Facebook group.
- **A post-it board** was set up in ward 34 and a **white board** in ward 35 to allow staff to add any comments, concerns or suggestions over a six week period. Allowing staff plenty of time to provide feedback was important.
- **A WhatsApp group** was set up to allow staff to contact the team and to provide any feedback.



### **Key tips for staff engagement**

- **Involve** frontline staff at the start of the journey
- Build up a relationship with staff and **listen** to any concerns and suggestions
- Show staff that changes being tested/adopted are based on what really **matters to patients**
- Use **different ways to gather feedback** from staff and tailor the approach to the pilot unit/ward e.g. informal 1:1 feedback, using white boards in staff areas, using social networking (such as WhatsApp or the trust's intranet), using social media such as Facebook
- **Allow time:** understand that it can take some time for staff to engage with the changes being tested
- **Act on staff feedback** where possible: show you are listening and value their views
- **Abandon or adapt ideas** which are not being reliably implemented by staff
- When spreading the Always Event to other areas, **use feedback from staff** in the pilot unit to show how it can work. Filming staff can be a powerful tool.





## Engaging patients: the importance of co-design

A key distinction of an Always Event is that it is co-designed with patients, service users and family members. The team found it difficult to engage the carers of existing patients staying on the pilot wards with the Always Event: the carers did not want to leave the ward and in some instances they were not able to return to the workshops due to their caring responsibilities. The team therefore made use of an existing group, called the Influence Panel, to assist with co-designing changes. This group includes patients, carers and members of the public and meets monthly to help ensure the patient voice is at the centre of the organisation's service improvements. One member of this group is an advocate for the Always Event and is part of the project team.

The importance of co-designing changes with patients and carers was evident when designing the poster to promote the flexible visiting being offered to carers as part of the Always Event. The changes made by the group ensured that the wording used was appropriate and met the needs of carers. For instance, the group highlighted that it is not suitable for a carer to be called a 'loved one' or 'family carer'. Changes were also made to ensure the poster was quick and easy to read.

**The patients and carers also simplified the wording of their Always Event vision statement:**

**"If my loved one is admitted to hospital they will always have the comfort and support of my presence whenever they wish."**



**"My carer will always be welcomed whenever I come to or am admitted to the hospital."**

**Carers Welcome**  
Blackpool Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

**A Guide for all Carers**

To support you in visiting this ward outside of normal hours, we have developed the Carers Guide to explain what is expected of you and what you can expect from us whilst on this ward.

**How we can work together to help the patient**

We will support you in doing what you would do for the patient at home.

This might include:

- Helping with eating and drinking if needed
- Helping with their daily routine such as washing and/or shaving and dressing
- Please fill in the "Paint me a Picture" leaflet to help us to get to know the patient and their likes and dislikes
- If necessary, we may be able to support you to stay overnight with the patient
- We will always include you in discussions about the patient's care

**To protect the wellbeing of all our patients we will expect you to:**

- Comply with the hospital's hand washing policy
- If you have diarrhoea or vomiting please do not visit for 48 hours
- Please do not visit if you have cold or fever
- Use chairs and do not sit on the bed
- Limit visitors to two at any one time
- Be aware that there may be times when you are asked to leave the room for a short while
- Keep noise to a minimum so as not to disturb other patients
- Unless there is an emergency please do not interrupt staff when they are with another patient
- If a staff member is wearing a red tabard, they are distributing medication and must not be disturbed to prevent errors

tell US @BplPatient\_Exp patientexperienceteamBTH

People Centred Positive Together we care Compassion Excellence

While the Influence Panel includes a mix of people, it was noted by the project team that it's important to be mindful that those involved in the co-design need to understand the needs of the patient group that is the focus of the Always Event.



**Patients involved in the co-design need to understand the needs of the patient group that is the focus of the Always Event.**



## Sustaining and spreading

The project team are now looking to spread the Always Event across the whole trust so that carers are welcomed in all wards. Given the challenges with engaging staff in the pilot wards, the team are undertaking the following steps to help with a successful spread to other areas:

- Holding an official launch event (co-designed by the Influence Panel) and offering exciting competitions for wards to create their own promotions for the Always Event
- Using social media to showcase the change and spark excitement within the staff
- Educating staff via a 'Grand Round' to help them understand where the change has come from, why it's needed, to highlight the successful implementation on the pilot wards and to give staff the opportunity to ask questions
- Showing staff a film that was made in the pilot wards which focused on why staff like the John's Campaign and why they think it should be implemented across the organisation. This helps to ensure reliable implementation
- Meeting with Matrons, ward managers and senior managers across the organisation to inform them of the change and to secure their engagement to help with the implementation.



**The sustainability of the Always Event is based on the foundations that have been laid in the beginning: building relationships with staff to truly understand what matters to them and the patients in their areas, actively listening, understanding their priorities, and putting them at the heart of their Always Event**

[Project team leader]



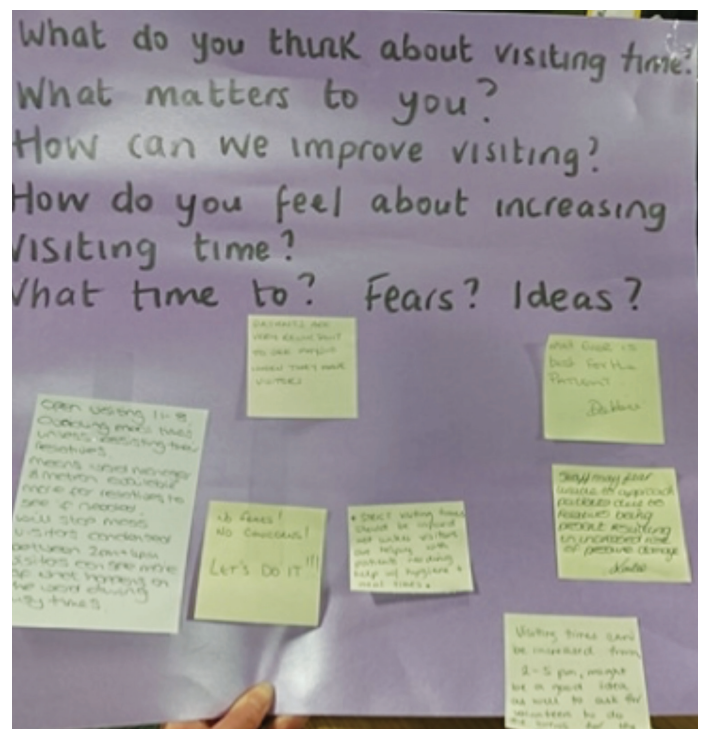
### Next steps

A second, but related, Always Event is now being piloted on wards 34 and 35 to allow **flexible visiting for all visitors** and not just for carers of patients on the ward. Staff on these wards felt they did not need to restrict visiting for any patient due to the positive impact of the first Always Event.

The project team asked for feedback from the staff using the 'post it board' and white board and interviewed patients and their visitors on the wards.

After 6 weeks the feedback was analysed. This showed that staff, patients and their visitors would all like to increase the flexibility of visiting hours, although not in the morning. It was decided that the most appropriate visiting time was 2-8pm.

The project team are starting the plan-do-study-act cycles again to understand what the barriers are for staff being able to implement flexible visiting for all.



### Further information

If you would like more information about Blackpool's Always Event journeys, please email: [Leanne.Macefield@bfwhospitals.nhs.uk](mailto:Leanne.Macefield@bfwhospitals.nhs.uk)

For more information about the Always Events programme, please visit: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/always-events/>