"Words and ideas can change the world"[1]

Learning from Excellence in the Edinburgh Dental Institute
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Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a process that aims to discover what energises people, what gives life to an organisation, and what people care about[2]. The LfE variation consists of 5 stages, Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny. We have used this approach to describe the LfE project within the Edinburgh Dental Institute.

Define

Feedback can be defined as "any summary of clinical performance of healthcare over a specified period of time" [3]. The positive benefits of feedback are well documented within the academic literature. A review of general education literature found feedback to be one of the most beneficial influences on learning[4]. This is also reflected in the medical literature. One systematic review found 70% of the studies included for review demonstrated that feedback itself had a positive influence on clinician's performance[5].

Whilst many training programs/institutions encourage feedback to be given as part of an appraisal/portfolio process, the authors found anecdotally that the structure for feedback is often quite prescriptive, and tends to focus on skills to be improved, rather than wider learning from what is done well.

Discover

Morale is low in the dental profession. The increasing culture of complaints and litigation results in a constant focus on mistakes which in turn causes stress and anxiety. A recent BDA survey highlighted fear of litigation as the greatest cause of stress for dentists[6]. We believe that actively recognising excellent practice in the profession is crucial in changing this negative culture.

There was no existing system within the Edinburgh Dental Institute (EDI) to report excellent practice. Learning from Excellence (LfE) was used as a framework to develop a positive reporting system. A paper nomination system was piloted within the Restorative Department from April-July 2019. 24 nominations were made during the pilot. Key words and statements from these are shown in Figure 1. Letters of thanks were sent to nominators and letters of recognition were sent to nominees, quoting the feedback they had been given.

The response to LfE has been positive. It has now been introduced in all departments, and over 30 nominations have been made in other departments in the hospital. In a post-implementation survey 60.47% of staff said they preferred a letter of recognition to a certificate. Nominees state they value receiving specific feedback. Seeing the words a patient or colleague had written gives the nomination authenticity and makes it more personal than a certificate. Being aware that colleagues recognise their efforts makes staff feel valued.

Interviews were conducted with some clinicians who had received a learning from excellence letter to discuss their experience of the program. Some of their responses are included opposite.

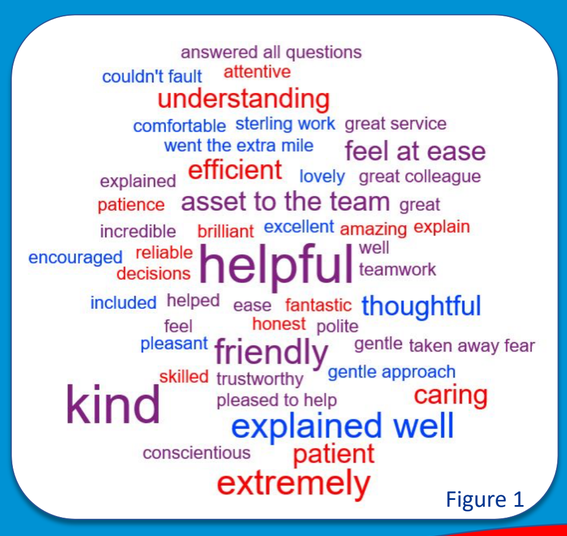

Figure 1

"LfE also worked at a team level.
The quantity and content of the positive feedbacks could be shared at team meetings to help boost team morale overall"

"As a clinician, it's amazing when a patient gives you a thank you card because it shows how much they've appreciated your efforts. However, often you don't get to learn exactly what you did that prompted it.

With LfE you get feedback from patients themselves about what exactly you're doing well. And this helps with self reflection and personal growth."

"For those patients that might be disinclined to give positive feedback perhaps due to personality or language or financial reasons, it gives an easy way to show appreciation for good experiences"

Dream

We want to see LfE as ingrained in our culture as Datix is. We want to introduce LfE throughout the local Public Dental Service (PDS) and to encourage dental practices to engage in excellence reporting.

Design

We have created a passionate team headed by the principle nurse of the Edinburgh Dental Institute, who has been committed to its success since the outset of this project. Enthusiastic staff lead LfE in each department. We are planning Appreciative Inquiry meetings with departments doing LfE well to discover what is working and how to do more .

Destiny

LfE has been reviewed at a senior management level in NHS Lothian, and learning points are discussed regularly in departmental meetings. We plan to share our experience at conferences and local professional meetings to encourage colleagues to recognise excellent practice and the good in the profession.

References

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