

Improving NHS Accessibility for Blind and Partially Sighted Patients

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There are approximately 200,000 blind and partially sighted people in the West Midlands

Recognising a number of poor NHS experiences nationally, Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust partnered with Thomas Pocklington Trust and later the Birmingham Sight Loss Council to start a conversation and learn how we could personalise care in a coproduced way.

Louise spearheaded an opportunity for BCHC to host a patient forum made up of blind and partially sighted individuals. We began with a blank sheet of paper, with no assumptions made on what a solutions and improvements might be.

One of our members gave a harrowing account of in his words “imagine what it might be like to have a stranger come into your home, and not know if that individual was an NHS community nurse, or a con artist, trying to take advantage.”

The group alongside community nurse leaders resonated with his experience listened to his idea for us to create a secret word, or password that could be added to his clinical record.

As a patient, he would create this with his nursing team and upon arrival, nurses would verbally give the password / secret word. This reduces anxiety and personalises his care.

This was easier said than done, as there were multiple barriers for the NHS to do this easily across 1000+ community staff.

I first had a glimmer of hope when I heard the commitment from one particular director of nursing at our first patient forum. Somehow, despite the brick wall of NHS governance the changes were integrated into the clinical system and hundreds of clinicians across the Trust were being trained by us, Thomas Pocklington, alongside our volunteers from Birmingham Sight Loss Council.

Next came their Chief Executive. Projects like this often fail without Executive buy-in. Not only did nurses on the ground attend our simulation spectacle awareness sessions that allowed sighted colleagues to understand the different types of visual impairment, such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, but the chief executive brought this training to his senior Leadership forum so that every senior nurse, therapy lead, or clinical director in the Trust was given the task of making this a priority for their areas. They then followed up and training was delivered to hundreds of clinicians in their areas at workshops, away days and key events.



But the work had only just started. We quickly realised this was an Always Experience. The project couldn't end, should not have a closing timeframe, but become an ongoing commitment as the Trust evolved. As many of you in this room know, Patient Experience is the golden thread that weaves everything together and this was one of the only times, a partnership has truly understood how coproduction, and collaborative working ensures consistently high-quality outcomes for patients.



Clinical records updated to include communication preferences and reasonable adjustments. Options for phone calls over letters and large-print, high-contrast letters. Secret word system for home visits to verify staff identity and reduce anxiety. Over 800 nurses and therapists and senior staff trained in sight loss awareness. Patient stories at Board meetings highlight improved safety, confidence and independence. A documentary for NHS staff on Sight Loss Awareness. A guest speaker with lived experience spoke at our International Nurses Day celebrations thanking the team for their work.

And we intend to keep going...thank you