

# SOUTHERN HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL



## *Focus group discussion on Patients’ Experiences of the Haematuria Clinic, Daisy Hill Hospital*

**August 1999**

## **Background**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999, the Southern Health and Social Services Council facilitated a focus group discussion with patients who had attended the Haematuria Clinic at Daisy Hill hospital. The day procedure unit had previously written to patients asking whether or not they would be willing to take part in a discussion group on their experiences and views of the Clinic. Four patients indicated that they were and these 4 then took part in the discussion group at the Canal Court Hotel on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999.

## **Overall view**

The overwhelming view of all four patients who had attended the Haematuria Clinic was positive.

*“...it went really well for me now, it really did.”*

*“...it really was an excellent experience.”*

Patients had been nervous about their referral to the Haematuria Clinic and about the actual tests which would take place. However they were impressed with how staff made them feel at ease and as comfortable as possible. They were satisfied with the level of information they received both by post before their appointment and from the nursing and medical staff on the day. A number of issues were raised and the Trust may wish to consider whether and how these could be addressed. One related to lengthy waiting times in x-ray, another to the lack of information about the purpose of the blood tests and also the lack of follow-up by the GP of the blood test results.

## **Awareness of Haematuria clinic**

None of the focus group participants were aware of the Haematuria clinic before they were referred there but they understood why they were referred.

*“I never heard of it before.”*

*“I didn't know what it was all about at all, I knew I had...a problem.”*

## **Information received**

Participants had been given directions to the clinic before their appointment and thought these were clear.

Three of the four participants had received information about the clinic and the tests by post prior to their appointment. This information was generally regarded as being useful. Participants considered that these leaflets explained what would happen generally without going into the detail of the tests.

*“...basically telling you really what was going to go on.”*

*“...it wasn't the details of it all..”*

*“The leaflet I got now explained in fair detail without going into the nitty gritty...they gave you enough information...I think if they gave you any more information they could unduly worry you...”*

One woman had been at the Clinic twice, on the first occasion when she was referred, she had an appointment two days later and on this occasion did not receive information by post but her own GP told her what would happen. On the second occasion information was received by post.

Much emphasis was placed on the information which was verbally communicated to the patients by nursing and the medical staff on the day of their visit to the clinic. Some participants appeared to have got more from this method of communication than from the written information received.

*“I was explained what was going on...which really helped me...as I went along....”*

*“He explained in fair detail what he was going to do”*

*“I didn't know what was going to happen at all. I had no idea...then when I was there...the doctor explained what it was all about.”*

Participants were asked whether or not they thought the provision of any further information on the tests would have been helpful. The combination of the written and verbal information and the level of detail communicated was considered to be adequate. They cautioned against providing too much detail as anything further might have been off-putting.

*“I would imagine that in somebody who is a bit squeamish, that would be very very difficult.”*

*“...too much information and you would start worrying about it.”*

*“I think that if they had have told you any more you would have been up to high doh.”*

*“I don’t honestly think they could do any more.”*

Participants were told that they could have lunch between the morning and afternoon procedures and that they could visit the canteen, stay on the ward or go home.

### **Treatment by staff**

Participants had been nervous about their referral to the Haematuria clinic, both because of the fear of the outcome but also because of the procedures.

*“It was an experience...the dread...just the thought of what was going to happen.”*

*“It was sheer panic on my part because I wasn’t sure what I was in for.”*

*“I didn’t know what was going to happen at all, I had no idea.”*

*“I think it was the unknown which was frightening rather than anything else.”*

Staff were regarded as being very helpful in explaining the procedures and putting patients at ease and managing their fears and feelings of apprehension.

*“...when I came back up, the girls were more than helpful...the nurses, at explaining what was going on.”*

*“I was apprehensive about what it might be and they were really were good and caring.”*

Participants also found the explanation provided by the staff during the procedures to have been helpful.

*“Even when you’re having it done.. it’s helpful...to talk through this thing.”*

Another feeling also experienced by patients was embarrassment. Patients considered how they were treated by staff to have eased those feelings of embarrassment.

*“To be honest with you, I was very embarrassed... and I could see that they weren’t the least bit embarrassed....That eased it for me”*

*“They went out of their way to make it as normal as possible.”*

*“They really were extraordinary calm and collected.”*

*“They certainly made it comfortable to be honest.”*

Other general comments made about the staff were as follows.

*“...those nurses in that department are absolutely first class”*

*“Very friendly”*

*“Very professional”*

*“...they were lovely people...”*

When asked whether or not they thought it important that the staff acted in the manner in which they did, all agreed that it was very important for staff to put the patient at ease and reassure them etc.

## **Waiting times**

There was some variation in the length of time patients had to wait in the x-ray department. Some waited for less than half an hour and they generally thought that this was acceptable.

*“I was up and taken within half an hour which was very surprising...because in hospitals you can't say you can do certain things in five minutes, it's whatever time it takes to see a patient.”*

One participant waited approximately one hour and considered this wait a lengthy one.

*“The only delay as far as I was concerned was the x-ray department...that was very slow.”(approx. 1 hour)*

But this was attributed to how busy the department was.

*“There was a tremendous number of people waiting for x-rays with all sorts of visible injuries, they really were very slow about it but then they had so many.”*

And the participant did not express dissatisfaction with this wait.

*“I had my knitting with me, I was quite happy..”*

Two patients went home after their x-ray and returned for their afternoon appointment. One patient went to her car to have her lunch and smoke a cigarette and another stayed on the ward. The person who went to her car did so because she could not smoke in the hospital.

## **Tests**

*“What I had I'm sure you know is not the nicest thing in the world.”*

While participants did not find the tests pleasant or enjoyable, they generally found them to have been less painful than they expected. One participant said he found it to be:

*“...no worse than going to the dentist.”*

He suggested that it might be useful to include this on the information leaflet distributed to patients.

### **Results of tests**

At the end of the appointment the results of the tests indicated that all but one participant in this focus group discussion did not need any follow-up tests or treatment. The individual who did, required a further test but more serious conditions/illnesses had been ruled out. So in effect all of the participants of this focus group discussion had a favourable outcome and were quite relieved to hear this.

*“It’s great to hear that everything is clear. When I came out I was quite happy about the whole thing.”*

*“I was happier coming out than I was going in.”*

Given this, it would be important for the Trust to consider the experiences and views of those who may not have heard positive news and may have needed referred for treatment.

In the case of the individual who needed a further test, the consultant explained why this was the case and reassured the patient.

*“He put me at ease that there wasn’t anything there that I was worried about.”*

*“He explained what it could be and it wasn’t what I thought it might have been or could have been.”*

Participants said that their test results were explained in a straightforward manner and was easy to understand. All participants said they had an opportunity to ask questions.

### **Feature most liked.**

The aspect of the Haematuria clinic which appeared to be most liked by patients was the staff. In particular their attitude which was illustrated by their caring and helpful behaviour and putting

the patient at ease. This led the participants to the conclusion that they were genuinely interested in them.

*“One of the points that I liked best about it ...they were interested...you could see that genuinely, you weren’t just somebody ‘get in and get the next one in’.”*

### **Suggestions for improvements**

All of the patients had been seen immediately or very soon after their arrival to the Day Procedure Unit so the following suggestion made by participants is hypothetical rather than based on their own individual experiences. One focus group participant thought that if a patient had to wait in a queue behind other patients for their test(s) this could cause or increase the level of anxiety. Other patients agreed with this and suggested that this should be avoided.

*“... if they were waiting behind people...”*

*“...If there was a string of people there I think maybe you would get more nervous.”*

None of the participants had any complaints about the Haematuria clinic.

### **GP follow up on blood tests**

Participants recounted having a number of blood tests taken while at the Haematuria Clinic. While some knew what the tests were for, others did not and would have liked to.

*“They didn’t tell me what it was all about.”*

These blood tests were sent away for analysis and participants were aware of this. Two participants did not have the results of their blood tests discussed with their GP.

*“I never heard a thing about it.”*

*“ I haven’t heard anything since March nor yet the June appointment.”*

*“I have been told absolutely nothing.”*

*“My own GP has slipped up very badly.”*

One participant had requested the results of the tests on a number of occasions but had been told that they had not returned. These participants had made the assumption that the tests were clear otherwise they would have received some feedback but they still had some doubt in their mind.

### **Follow-up**

One participant had a previous appointment in the Haematuria clinic 3 months previous and the June appointment was a follow-up appointment during which she underwent the same tests. She did not need or want any follow-up contact or support from the clinic between these two appointments. Another individual who was referred for a further test said that he did not feel the need for this either. In this case the individual was on holidays for a large proportion of the time between the two dates.

All four participants said they would be willing to provide comments on the Questionnaire and the Care Pathway.

### **Summary**

Overall, the views of participants were very positive.

*“...we were all very pleased.”*

Mostly, the reason for this was due to the attitude and behaviour of the nursing staff and consultant. Staff were considered to be caring and genuinely interested and helped the patient feel at ease and allay their feelings of apprehension and embarrassment by explaining the procedures before and during the tests.

A number of issues were raised which require some consideration from the Trust:-

- ❖ Waiting times in x-ray.
- ❖ Avoiding lengthy waiting times for other tests.
- ❖ Information to the patient on the reason for the blood tests (i.e. what was being tested).
- ❖ Follow-up of blood test results with GP or information to patient that will only be followed up if tests are not clear.
- ❖ Need to find out what are the views and experiences of patients who required treatment.