



The **Regulation** and  
**Quality Improvement**  
Authority

# **'Speak Up'** **Regulation in an 'Open'** **Health and Social Care** **System**

**RQIA Round Table**  
**"What is Important?" Summary**  
**Thursday 9 November 2023**  
**Malone House Belfast**



# Introduction

The purpose of the Round Table event on 9 November 2023 was to listen, reflect, and learn how to improve RQIA's performance as the health and social care regulator in an 'open' health and social care system. Speaking up, both for patients and families, and for staff, is a vital part of securing patient safety and improving service quality.

The event brought together senior leaders from across the health and social care services, from professional regulators, commissioners, professional bodies, people from academia and from systems regulation across the UK and Ireland, with service user representatives.

This is the gist of what attendees said they wanted to see happen to make 'Speak Up – Change the Culture' a reality in health and social care in Northern Ireland; and what they judge is standing in the way of progress. It is drawn from the Survey Questionnaires that those who attended completed, and from the discussion during the event.



# Speaking Up



## **What needs to happen to enable patients, families, carers to share their experience of the service and to be heard and valued?**

- Make it easy for patients to share their experience
- Normalise patients sharing their experience
- Senior leaders and all staff encourage patients to give feedback/ share experience
- There is a simple way to share experience that's not left to a Complaint or Compliment route
- Organisations give a clear message that they want my feedback, they value it
- There's a neutral facilitator to give feedback to
- There's evidence that sharing experience makes a difference
- They take responsibility to listen and act
- Staff and managers are open with me
- There is a consistent approach to asking patients to share their experience across the health and social care organisations

## **What's stopping this now?**

- Rigid structures
- Too many processes, needs simplified
- Overly bureaucratic and complex systems
- Patients don't know how or who to feedback to, bar making a complaint
- Fear of reprisal for the patient or loved one
- Fear of reputational damage for the organisation
- Fear of damaging "good" staff
- ALL ultimately leading to: Reliance on public inquiries to draw out lessons

## **What needs to happen to enable staff to speak up and ensure their professional experience is shared and valued?**

- Leaders are inclusive and encourage reporting concerns
- Leaders listen without defensiveness or penalising
- Create psychological safe environment – ensure staff know they will not suffer as a result of raising issues and in fact are encouraged and supported
- Enable teams to meet and build relationships
- Build relationships across the organisation
- Staff supported to be confident in speaking up and not afraid to do so
- Simple language and process
- See that speaking up is valued and makes a difference, something will happen
- Complete the process quickly
- Leaders role model open behaviours; actual behaviours match messages

## **What's stopping this now?**

- Complex language and unclear and inconsistent processes
- A focus on data and statistics
- Bureaucratic processes
- Mismatch between professed standards and expectations, and actual reactions and behaviours including at senior levels
- Broken processes that don't work
- Adverse experiences reported by those who have spoken up, and observed by others (repeatedly)
- ALL leading to a culture of:
  - Fear
  - Blame
  - Apathy – nothing will happen/ change
  - Helplessness

# Listening, Hearing and Acting

**What needs to happen to ensure all Leaders demonstrate that they value experience and evidence from patients and from staff - that it is heard, valued and acted on?**

- Listening should be followed by timely, constructive and consistent way of responding
- Courageous conversations happen when needed
- Leaders should acknowledge when harm has been done
- Leaders should showcase how sharing of experience by patients and by staff has been acted upon and made a positive difference
- Leaders in organisations, should show openness by their day to day behaviours in work
- Investigations into complaints and concerns and incidents or “near misses” should result in actual behaviour change
- Provide educational events to describe how to share experience, how to have difficult and courageous conversations
- Create platforms for sharing experience in groups, producing agreed actions, and implementing them

**What’s stopping this now?**

- Service pressures
- Staff morale
- Staff concerns
- Defensive practice
- Leaders acceptance of poor or inappropriate behaviours
- Leaders engaging in poor or inappropriate behaviours
- Lack of the skills needed to hold difficult conversations, communicate tough messages constructively,
- ALL leading to:
  - Difficulty in reaching absolute clarity on what is needed
  - Lack of real commitment to take uncomfortable or difficult decisions and actions

**What should those who regulate professions (doctors, nurses, midwives, social workers and others) do to promote positive professional behavioural change?**

- Promote and endorse a culture of openness
- Provide support to professionals
- Embed professional standards that are founded in patient well-being, compassion, and collaborative team working
- Develop relationships and networks
- Streamline professional practice processes

**What’s stopping this now?**

- Working environment/ persistent pressures
- Public/media criticism
- ‘Rogue’ staff have a detrimental impact for all professions
- ALL leading to:
  - Fear of loss of reputation/public confidence by regulators
  - Excessive focus on punitive actions



# Changing the Culture

## What actions should all leaders within health and social care take to set the tone and promote a culture of openness and proactive responses to experiences heard from patients and staff?

- Engage with staff – ask for opinions and feedback; demonstrate results “You said, We did”
- Visibility of leaders living the values: tangible demonstration, day to day, of behaviours and actions they want to see: approachable, open, active
- Encourage reporting of ‘near-misses’
- Hold managers to account for implementing the open culture the organisation endorses
- “Give permission” –to listen, learn, and change

## What’s stopping this now?

- Workload
- Staffing levels
- Lack of a formal / framework for ‘Speaking Up’
- Lack of skills and training
- Engagement gap with political representatives:
- ALL leading to:
  - Helplessness
  - Political apathy
  - Loss of public confidence

## What needs to happen so that service regulators promote positive cultural change in health and social care?

- Measure and report on the safety culture of organisations
- Use more carrot and less stick approach to regulation – Regulatory reform needed
- Support and encourage people to raise concerns
- Share good practice that they identify
- Bring stakeholders together to identify issues, barriers and solutions
- Demonstrate they respond when issues raised with them
- Ensure regulators can be easily contacted about concerns by patients and by staff
- Tackle the primitive image of Regulation
- Promote the role of the Regulator under the Public Interest Disclosure Order (1998)

## What’s stopping this now?

- Lack of capacity (skills; numbers) in Regulators
- Silo’ed working between Regulators
- Not sufficient sharing of/emphasis on staff and patient experience in regulatory reports
- Pressures across the system / competing demands
- Poor standards being ‘normalised’
- Protect reputation – hampers learning
- ALL leading to:
  - Many Inquiries
  - Stagnation

## What needs to happen so that other bodies – commissioners, ombudsmen, guardians, champions, others – can help drive positive cultural change?

- Visibility, and mature public conversations
- Engage, inform and listen to political representatives and community organisations
- Make openness everyone’s business
- Improve understanding of systems and roles
- Building effective relationships between organisations
- Collaboration on shared issues
- Make a clear, shared, commitment to openness
- Shared training / development opportunities
- Share positive learning and what is learned from failures
- Motivate and encourage

## What’s stopping this now?

- Silos and defending turf
- Complex and changing environment
- Multiple organisations – difficult to navigate; duplication and risk of gaps
- Lack of resources/capacity
- Lack of involvement with front line staff
- ALL leading to:
  - Lack of action: stagnation
  - Poor staff morale
  - Adverse political and media attention
  - Deteriorating public confidence



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