

Recognising and learning from positive events, can we improve the environmental provision for staff in our NHS Trust?

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Introduction, Aims and Hypothesis

Winnicott wrote of the necessity to provide an 'environmental provision which fosters a mother's belief in herself'¹ and of the mother's ability to 'hold' the infant successfully as a result. In mental health trusts most of our learning appears to focus on negative events, serious incidents or deaths. This is often experienced as destructive and persecutory yet we expect the staff to continue to hold and contain the patients despite the culture of fear and resentment.

We propose to assess the effect of a system for learning from positive events. We aim to use this system to counterbalance this negativity, help staff feel appreciated and to encourage curiosity and learning. We hypothesise that this will improve the ability of the staff to hold and contain their own anxieties as well as those of the patients in their care. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that this contributes to improved patient safety².

Since 2018 our Trust has run a pilot scheme encouraging staff to nominate colleagues or teams for excellent work. If successful they were given an award and encouraged to discuss the event and the learning at their team meetings.

Learning from positive events

FERFs (Favourable Event Reporting Forms) were introduced to the Trust in 2018 in the South West division as a means of acknowledging the work of staff and teams when positive events occur as well as to promote learning from this and recognise excellence.

Staff were invited to refer teams or other staff members who they felt showed an example of excellence in their work and what was learned as a result.

Figure 1: Example of the FERF nomination form

Method

We evaluated a pilot scheme of nominations by undertaking a thematic analysis of the reasons for nomination and what was learned. We then conducted an appreciative inquiry with a selection of the teams to better understand the staff experience.

The data collected since 2018 was collated and analysed using qualitative analysis data software (QDA Miner Lite) to identify themes in the reasons for nomination and learning.

We then identified the 3 teams who were the most frequent users of the FERF system and had a meeting to gain information about what they thought of the process and how it made them feel.

We interviewed each team via Microsoft Teams and encouraged open discussion about the process in order to learn about whether staff found it a valuable and useful process.

Results – Reasons for nomination

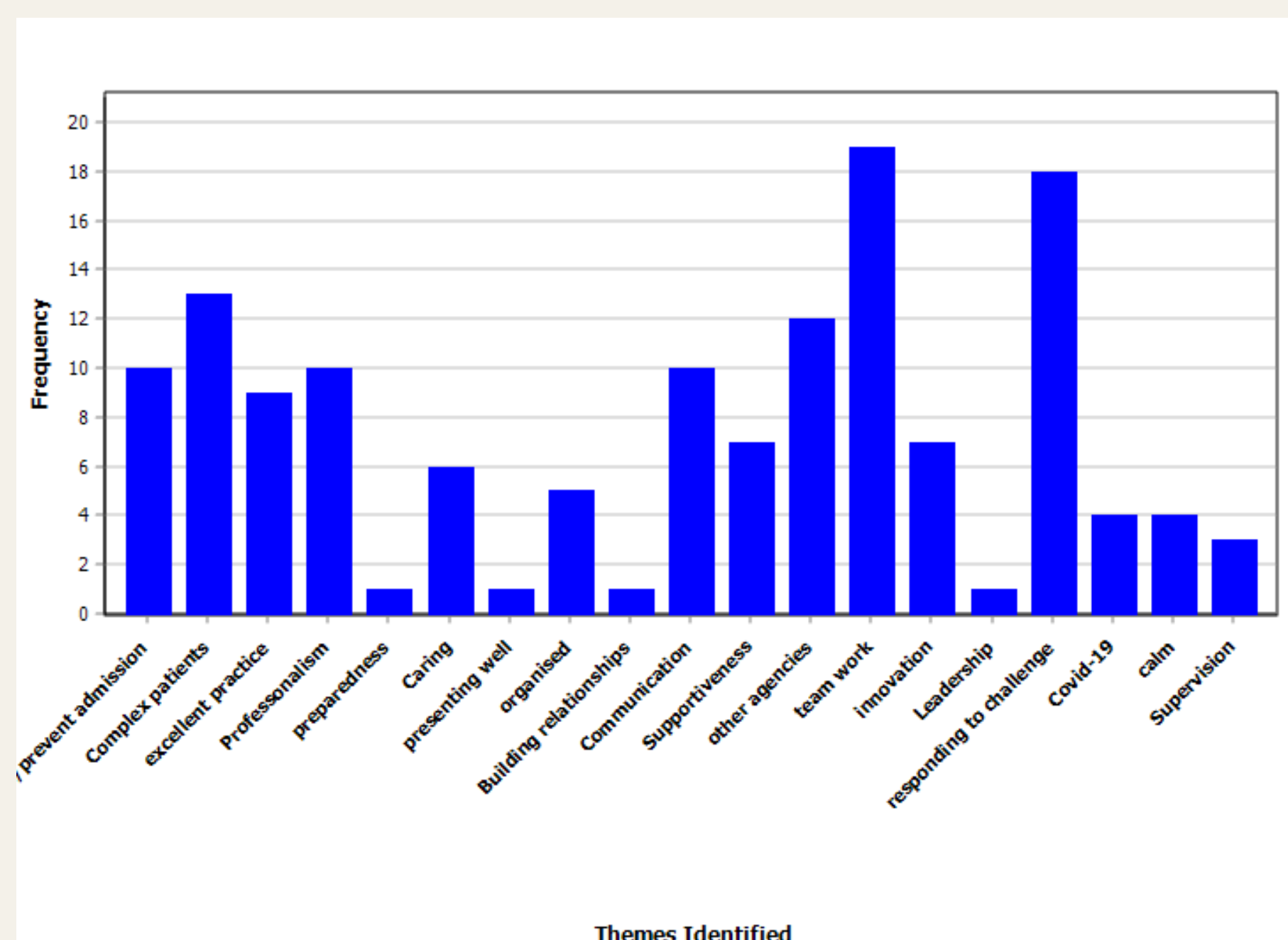


Figure 2. Bar chart showing reasons for nomination



Figure 3. Word cloud showing reasons for nomination (the larger the word, the more frequently this theme was observed in the data).

Learning Identified

Communication

cross team working
 collaborative working risk planning
 supporting colleagues
 team work leadership
 flexible approach supervision clear documentation
 sharing information accurate recording
 psychologically informed care checklists
 personalised approach holistic care
 humane approach therapeutic relationship

Figure 4. Word cloud showing themes in the learning identified

Results - of Appreciative Inquiry

- Overall regarded as a positive thing but felt to be for heroics or 'above and beyond' work. Only one team felt it was for every day work.
- People who have received FERFs 'appreciate the recognition' and said 'it made us feel valuable'.
- Felt to be good for staff retention and increasing morale. Useful to learn from others.
- Some teams felt it did not change practice and there was some cynicism about it.
- Barriers to using FERF included difficulty finding the form, finding it patronising, trying to make their narrative 'fit the form' and needing more clearly defined guidance around what to nominate someone for.
- Suggestions to improve included changing the name, making it more accessible, different ways to submit nominations i.e. voice recording.

Conclusions and Future Work

On the whole staff valued the project and the appreciation they received from their colleagues although there was some cynicism about it and some found it patronising. Learning was mainly around the importance of good communication within and between different teams and with patients. Many felt that the process could be more accessible and visible.

With some further modifications we feel this could be a valuable tool to gradually change organisational culture or 'environmental provision' in Winnicottian terms. We plan to amend the project in response to feedback and extend it across the Trust. We will then re-evaluate whether using this system has a positive effect on the culture and if this in turn has a positive impact on patient care.

References

1. Babies and Their Mothers – D.W. Winnicott, Merloyd Lawrence, 1992
2. Learning from Excellence Project - [Learning from Excellence – A call to learn from what goes well in healthcare](#)

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