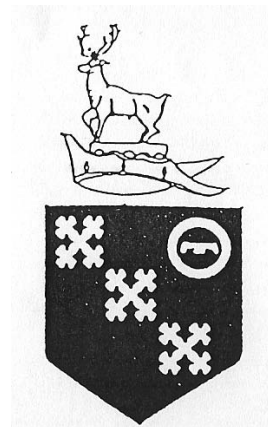

**Evaluation of the Knowledge and Information Centre
at St Thomas' Hospital: Executive Summary**

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Guy's and St Thomas' Charity

Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is the largest NHS-related charity in the UK, investing in improvements to the NHS in Lambeth and Southwark. Beneficiaries include Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, Lambeth and Southwark Primary Care Trusts, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust and their academic research partners such as King's College London. The Charity's funding helps support new services and innovations in the health services and fund research infrastructure as well as the translation of laboratory research into clinical practice. The Charity maintains the collection of art and heritage at Guy's and St Thomas' and commissions new works of art to enhance the environment at local healthcare centres.

Find out more on the Charity's website: www.gsttcharity.org.uk

The Cicely Northcote Trust

The Cicely Northcote Trust is a registered charity set up in 1909 to provide social work for the patients of St Thomas' Hospital. From its earliest beginnings the Trust also had a wider perspective and generated plans and projects, many of which were to affect and influence medico-social care for many people.

Today this tradition is continued through the research and projects which are sponsored by the Trust. While they are usually on social work and associated health needs in South London they frequently have national relevance. The main aim is to identify gaps in the services provided by statutory and voluntary organisations, and to demonstrate ways of filling these gaps so as to encourage the relevant authorities to take over the work. The Trust has been remarkably successful in identifying such services.

The Cicely Northcote Trust has a small annual income which is used to finance suitable projects, often in partnership with other organisations. The Trust monitors, evaluates and publishes reports on its work and welcomes suggestions for innovative projects which are in keeping with its aims.

For more information visit: www.cicelynorthcotetrust.org.uk

Executive summary

Introduction

Patient involvement in health care is now a priority for the NHS. Indeed patients are seen as partners in the health care process. Initiatives such as the Expert Patients Programme promote self-management and empowerment through engagement with other health care users and professionals.

Patients are encouraged to learn more about their health and take responsibility for their wellbeing. This requires patients to be able to access and understand reliable health information. However this can be unclear and information from health professionals can often be incomplete or complex.

The Knowledge and Information Centre (KIC) at St Thomas' Hospital aims to provide patients, staff and visitors with information on health conditions. It operates as a comprehensive resource centre, offering Trust-wide access to a wide range of health related books and leaflets, internet and email facilities, details of local and national support groups and information on drop-in clinics. Patients and visitors are able to find information for themselves, relax and read a newspaper or obtain assistance from staff to find more complex information. The KIC can be seen as a bridge between the professional clinicians and patients. The KIC is one of only a few such services in the country and as such this evaluation will provide evidence on whether this service positively contributes to patient involvement in the NHS.

Aims

This study aimed to evaluate both the experience of using the KIC service and the impact obtaining information has on users and their ability to manage their health.

Methods

The evaluation focused on the KIC clients for whom a detailed assessment of their information needs was made by the KIC staff (i.e., those people who made use of the complex enquiry service).

The evaluation used quantitative and qualitative approaches. There were three stages to the evaluation:

1. Every client who used the complex enquiry service was asked to complete a baseline/ experience questionnaire when they used the KIC service. 130 questionnaires were distributed and 61 were returned completed. On this first questionnaire clients were asked to indicate if they would be willing to take part in the second and third stages of the project.
2. Clients who agreed to participate in stage 2 completed a follow-up/ impact questionnaire one month after their baseline/ experience questionnaire. 36 questionnaires were returned at this stage.
3. Clients who agreed to participate in the final stage participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. 18 people took part in interviews.

Questionnaires were analysed using frequencies and basic statistics. Interviews were analysed by theme.

Ethical and research governance approvals were secured from Guy's Research Ethics Committee, London South Bank University, Faculty of Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee and Guy's R&D Department. The project was overseen by a Steering Group.

Our participants

The majority of people who completed a baseline/ experience questionnaire were female (66%), aged between 25 and 64 years (74%) and were white (72%). The majority had English as their first language (86%) and were either patients (46%) or visitors (21%) at St Thomas' Hospital.

The majority of people who completed follow-up/ impact questionnaire were female (75%), aged between 25 and 64 years (72%) and were white (72%). Ninety-two percent used English as their first language and 33% were patients at St Thomas' Hospital and 31% were visitors.

Of the people who participated in interviews 72% were female, 72% were aged between 25 and 64 years and 78% were white. All interviewees used English as their first language and 61% were either visitors or patients at St Thomas' Hospital.

Experience findings

The findings that relate to people's experiences of the KIC are briefly noted below:

Finding and accessing the KIC

- The majority of people came across KIC in passing, although some were also referred by health professionals.
- First impressions of the KIC were very positive. However some people were unsure what the KIC was and likened it to a library.
- The KIC was seen as being accessible for those with physical disabilities, although some were concerned that it would not be accessible for those with poor English skills as they may require a translator/ interpreter.

The KIC environment

- The KIC was viewed as spacious, quiet and peaceful. People enjoyed coming to the KIC and felt that the KIC provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Using the KIC

- The majority of people in our study used the KIC to find out about health conditions.
- The majority of people said they found it easy to find information on their own at the KIC. However some people needed help from staff, mainly because they could not use computers.

The KIC staff

- People were generally impressed by the KIC staff and felt they provided an excellent service. They felt that the staff communicated the difference between health information and health advice, respected their privacy and were easy to approach for help.
- The information provided by staff was sufficient in depth and quality and was delivered quickly. Staff often went out of their way to find additional information.
- People felt that staff communicated in a sensitive manner and were compassionate.

The value of the KIC

- The KIC was seen as overwhelmingly useful and an asset to St Thomas' Hospital.

Impact findings

The findings that show how using the KIC impacted on peoples' lives are briefly described below:

- An increased understanding of a health issue was the biggest benefit of using the KIC.
- Information provided helped people come to terms with their health issue. However sometimes it could be frightening at first as it brought home the reality of the situation.
- Using the KIC helped people gain confidence when dealing with health professionals and making decisions about their health care.
- Having clear, authoritative information legitimised people's health issues and empowered them. It also motivated them to find out more information.
- People sometimes passed information from the KIC onto others so the impact was not just restricted to those who directly accessed the service.
- Using the KIC also had social benefits such as making people feel less isolated and lonely and helping them meet new people or stay in touch with friends or family via email.

Suggestions for improvements

The main suggestions made by participants related to the structure or organisation of the KIC and are briefly listed below. Some people would like to see the following:

Physical environment

- A chair by the kiosk outside the KIC.
- A separate TV room so that people can properly watch TV if they wanted to.

Organisation of service

- An increase in the range of health conditions on which KIC provides information and more material on health conditions.
- Longer opening hours to allow those that work a traditional 9am –

5pm week to access the KIC.

- An outreach service with staff visiting wards to help people access health information.
- Better publicity and signage to the KIC.
- An expansion of the benefits service or a telephone service which you could call up to access health information.
- A training function at the KIC to teach people how to use computers if they are unable to do so.
- More volunteers.
- Someone independent who can talk with clients in more depth about the health information or provide health advice.
- KIC working with clinicians to produce better patient information for people using St Thomas' Hospital.
- Expansion of the KIC service to other sites.

Conclusions

The KIC service is viewed positively by users of the complex enquiry service. It is valued most for its staff and the information that they are able to provide. The information is valuable in that it helps improve knowledge or awareness about a health condition and also increases the confidence of clients to liaise with health professionals. Overall, it contributes positively patients' experience of St Thomas' Hospital. Clients would like to see the KIC expand to other sites.

Recommendations and further actions

A number of recommendations are made through the evaluation. The main recommendations are listed below. In the full report all recommendations and responses to these from the KIC management team can also be viewed:

- Extend open hours to increase access.
- Provide a private space for individuals to raise issues confidentially.
- Develop a publicity strategy for the KIC that signposts to the KIC service and highlights the range of material available.
- Increase the number of volunteers and signpost clients onto other health advocates where necessary.
- Check all information provided to clients is at a level that they can understand.
- Elicit suggestions from clients around material they would like to see added to the KIC.
- Encourage clients to discuss health information with their healthcare professionals.
- Offer clients information on further sources of support when information is provided.
- Work more closely with other departments within St Thomas' in relation to identifying and producing patient information materials.
- Consider offering an outreach service to wards for St Thomas' patients' who are not able to come to the KIC.
- Consider providing training for clients around health information.