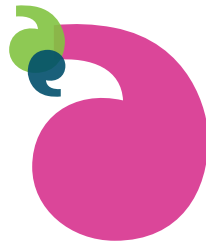


Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment
2016(PLACE)



Healthwatch Hertfordshire's experience of participating
in PLACE with 6 NHS Trusts and their Recommendations
for PLACE visits in 2017

● About PLACE

Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment are a self-assessment of a range of non-clinical services which contribute to the environment in hospitals, hospices and independent organisations providing NHS-funded care in England.

The assessments look at cleanliness, the condition of the buildings, how well the buildings meet the needs of those who use it e.g. signage, car parking, the availability and quality of food and drink and how well privacy and dignity is supported by the environment. Last year a new strand was added that looked at how 'dementia friendly' the environment of each organisation was for patients with dementia and this year some questions on disability have been added.

This type of assessment was introduced in April 2013 and it is carried out annually. The aim is to focus on what patients say matter and they are undertaken by a combination (at least 50% of the team) of patients, the public and other bodies with an interest in healthcare such as Healthwatch in partnership with the NHS Trust staff using a range of criteria to identify how well the trust is performing and identifying areas for improvement.

Visits generally start at the beginning of March and end at the beginning of June with NHS Trusts being given a specific time frame as to when a site visit must be completed by. Results from these audits are logged onto a national database which is then analysed and fed back to the Trusts and the public (see HSIC - Health and Social Care Information Centre now known as NHS Digital¹) in August.

Guidance on how to conduct PLACE assessments and how to involve and train patient assessors is available but it is up to the individual Trusts as to how they use it.

Healthwatch Hertfordshire has been involved from the beginning in the PLACE audits and has continued to support PLACE with the NHS Trusts in Hertfordshire and 2 Trusts outside of Hertfordshire where services are commissioned for a significant number of Hertfordshire residents.

● Healthwatch Hertfordshire's Role in PLACE in 2016

This is the third year that Healthwatch Hertfordshire (HwH) has formally written a report about the experiences of the HwH volunteers in the PLACE audits.

HwH supported the following 6 NHS Trusts with their PLACE visits which started in March 2016 and finished at the beginning of June 2016:

¹ <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21325>

- Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (HCT)
- Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (HPFT)
- East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust (ENHT)
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust (WHHT)
- Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust -Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals (RFL)
- The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust (PAHT)

HCT and HPFT have multiple sites where they deliver care and are undertaking PLACE visits constantly during the 3-month period whereas the acute trusts (ENHT, WHHT, RFL and PAHT) may only have 2 or 3 assessments in the same time frame.

The aim for HwH has been to have at least one HwH representative on the visits acting as an independent observer utilising our trained Enter and View representatives wherever possible. Visits which are to mental health units are more sensitive and require less volunteers per visit due to their size compared to an acute hospital Trust. Mental health site visits benefit from having assessors with experience or an understanding of mental health.

HwH hopes that this method can ensure a level of transparency and clarity of assessments across the Trusts used by Hertfordshire residents and that other patient assessors on the visits feel supported to give full and honest feedback.

In 2016 there were a total of 40 visits where at least one HwH representative was present with 23 different volunteers being used.

We invited our volunteers to give feedback on their experiences at each of the Trusts and added it to the HwH Board and Executive team members involved to produce observations and recommendations on the PLACE process.

● Pre Assessment Planning and Training

One of the key recommendations following the 2015 audits was for Trusts to consider joint training initiatives with other trusts in the County as some of the training gave very little insight into what it is actually like to go on a PLACE visit from a volunteer perspective.

This recommendation was taken up by Hertfordshire Community Trust (HCT) and together with HwH coordinated a PLACE training event with ENHT, HPFT and WHHT.

Positive responses were received from the Trusts, volunteers and from the **Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC)**:

'I am sure the trusts you are working with welcome and value your involvement...

We recognise that training for Patient Assessors is a crucial aspect of the whole programme since it is their views which lie at the heart of it. I would also echo your comments regarding consistency.'

And from Department of Health

'Thanks for this detailed and constructive report. I recognise your concerns about the training, but there is really no substitute for local knowledge. I'm pleased to see that the Hertfordshire trusts are working together with you to make best use of training time for this year - let's hope it's reflected in an even better process this time around.'

And from volunteers:

'the training prepared me for what look for and how to behave towards patients and staff'.

'the briefing was comprehensive'.

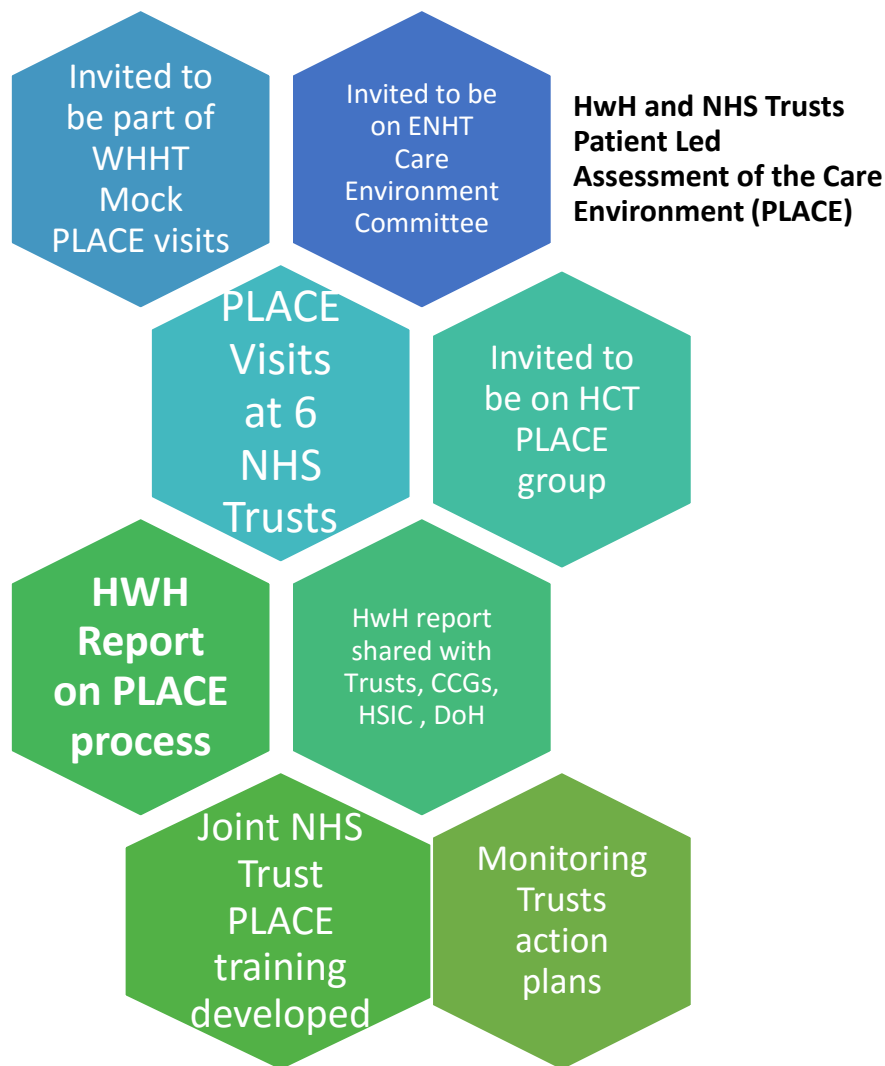
'I think the emphasis on a snapshot of the day. I enjoyed the working together in groups and hearing different views of people who have taken part'.

The joint training and was a large centrally based event and was appreciated by all those who participated but if this is repeated, it needs to be supplemented by smaller local training events to ensure that as many people as possible are represented in the PLACE audits.

Going forward, there could be greater sharing of volunteers. For example, Hertfordshire Community Trust (HCT) as a county wide Trust could use volunteers trained by the acute trust that covers the area where HCT's services are delivered.

It is essential that staff are made aware of PLACE and understand the role of the patient assessors. Some of the Trusts introduced mock PLACE assessments prior to the actual audits which helped to familiarise staff with the audits and HwH was invited to participate in the WHHT mock assessments.

ENHT have a Care Environment Committee where many of the factors that impact on PLACE scores are discussed. HwH was pleased to be invited to have a representative at these meetings. Similarly, HwH has a representative on the HCT and WHHT meetings where the Trusts discuss improvements to be made from PLACE action plans.



● The Assessments

How the assessments and day is organised can depend on the size and nature of the organisation. What HwH wanted to ensure was that assessments were fair and transparent and that everyone's view was taken into account.

HwH felt that this was indeed the case and were impressed by some of the improvements made, particularly at the Lister Hospital, Stevenage (ENHT). Volunteers particularly noted how welcome they were made to feel by staff at all levels at ENHT.

Volunteers liked having a member of staff to record their scores and comments and were confident that these were recorded accurately. On the whole volunteers felt listened to and had plenty of opportunity to make their views known. Often the lead staff member would point out areas to note and if appropriate rectify it immediately.

Organising the assessments so that they tested out the food delivery at different times of the day was seen as good practice.

The PLACE assessment forms are long and can be repetitive and therefore the amount of time to carry out a visit should not be underestimated by the Trust as this can make volunteers anxious.

Payment of expenses to volunteers did not always go smoothly and each Trust may have a different system or 'rules' about what they will cover. It is therefore essential that Trusts make it clear to the volunteers from the outset what they will cover and how and when they will reimburse expenses. Volunteers can therefore make an informed decision about whether to participate in an assessment where for example car parking is free but travel to the provider premises is not covered.

For example, WHHT now has clear instructions on their website for volunteers claiming expenses for any activities including PLACE.

● Post Assessment

The importance of PLACE is certainly recognised by the Trusts and both the Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Care Quality Commission take notice of the scores. Analysis of the results and the reasons for any low scores are identified and action plans put in place that are regularly monitored. This seems to work best where ward managers and facilities teams work together to take responsibility for the progress of improvements.

However, there are some areas that Trusts cannot improve without wholesale refurbishment to the ward area and any money spent needs to be carefully thought out as to what will really improve patient safety and experience rather than to gain more points for the audit.

HCT has completed some analysis on what actions are currently unachievable and will therefore have a negative impact on the 2017 scores. This is important for staff so that they can focus on what can be improved and not become demoralised when scores do not improve significantly.

It will be important for Trusts to keep these 'unachievable' actions in mind for long term planning should the facilities be renovated in the future so that they meet the PLACE criteria to improve the patient safety and experience.

● Conclusion

The PLACE assessments have been carried out in a fair and transparent way and it has been good for Healthwatch Hertfordshire to have been involved in these assessments. The joint training event showed the willingness of Trusts to work together and try new ways to make PLACE an effective tool for patients and staff. It is evident that Trusts have worked hard to improve scores and continue to look at ways of meeting the high standards required by PLACE.

PLACE is an intensive process for both volunteers and staff and this needs to be recognised by senior staff so that both are supported in their roles.

● Recommendations

<p>Training</p>	<p>Provide training that is practical and engaging and not just a PowerPoint presentation.</p> <p>If a joint Trust training session is planned for 2017, ensure there are also some local training sessions available to increase volunteer numbers available and ensure that people can play a positive role in their community.</p> <p>Give volunteers the opportunity to undertake PLACE for different Trusts particularly where Trusts share the same site.</p> <p>Ensure staff are also trained and understand that this is a patient led assessment using a pre-set questionnaire by the NHS and it is what is seen on the day.</p>
<p>Volunteers and HwH representation</p>	<p>Over the last 4 years HwH has provided a large number of volunteers for PLACE and for some visits HwH representatives were the only patient assessors.</p> <p>For 2017 HwH will only provide 1 HwH representative that will be designated by the HwH office and communicated to the individual Trust. These representatives will report back on how the visits were run. For HPFT and HCT where there are multiple sites, HwH will only sample a number premises rather than attend every visit.</p> <p>HwH will be happy to advertise to their whole membership at the beginning of PLACE as to how to be involved (not just to trained volunteers) potentially providing a bigger pool of volunteers but responses would be direct to the Trust involved not through the HwH office.</p> <p>However, should a Trust have difficulty obtaining enough volunteers to complete an assessment, HwH would be happy to be contacted to help out.</p>
<p>Volunteer Expenses</p>	<p>HwH believes that volunteers should not be out of pocket when undertaking PLACE activities, however it is up to each Trust to decide their own system of reimbursement. Some</p>

volunteers do not like to ask for expenses and therefore do not claim.

It is therefore essential that volunteers know what the system is from the beginning and are clear about the process.