

Wendy Entwistle interview

Waikato District Health Board (DHB) consumer engagement facilitator

Wendy Entwistle, consumer engagement facilitator at Waikato DHB, is constantly surprised by consumers' generosity. 'There are a lot of allies out there and for me one of the big learnings has been, "Don't be afraid to ask people."'

Wendy is Waikato's first consumer engagement facilitator, a post established two years ago. 'I think just the fact the post exists has raised people's awareness, which was growing, about the absolute necessity and importance of involving consumers in everything we do,' she says.

The DHB is reaching the stage where from the outset of a new project staff are asking, 'How are we going to involve a consumer?'

Wendy talks them through the process. If the project is ward-related, 'we might talk about recent patients in the ward, about the kind of person who might be able to contribute – somebody who's had an experience but can also see beyond their own situation and work constructively'.

She advises staff about ways to support consumers. 'What do they need to fully participate? Staff might think about "If we've got meetings when would they be? Where would they be? Does this consumer need somebody to spend some time with them, to give them some background? What do we want from the consumer and what might a meeting that includes them look like?"'

The DHB is trying to ensure consumers are heard on as many levels as possible, including via patient stories. 'At the board of clinical governance, which meets monthly, every second meeting we endeavour to have a patient story, and that's usually somebody who has actually come into the meeting.

'I think the power of having a patient or family member there is that it grounds the group. It's a message that we're all here because of the patients.

'The stories are really varied, the experiences are really varied; a mixture of good and less good experiences. They can highlight the need for improvement and change; they can also highlight where improvement has happened as a result of that patient raising an issue.'

A lot of Wendy's work is around consumer feedback via a number of mechanisms the DHB has in place, including:

- cards and an online form that ask three things – which service or department the consumer is talking about; what the DHB did well; and what the DHB could have done better
- surveys and focus groups
- including consumers in audits of nursing and midwifery care
- leadership walks around the DHB incorporating conversations with consumers.

DHBs need to appreciate that resource is necessary to support consumers, says Wendy.

'I think there's been a fear it's going to be too costly, but actually it's more costly not to involve consumers.'