

Amplify: Empowering younger people to access and use healthcare safely

Gary Blake

NIHR Yorkshire and Humber PSRC

Authors: Blake G and Murray J.

There are approximately 7.35 million young adolescences (16-24) in the UK. Research has identified barriers young adolescences may face when navigating their healthcare such as lack of trust, feeling unheard, difficulty with waiting times and lack of awareness of available services which may impact on their safety. Young adolescents who utilise healthcare services report the struggle to understand the information provided to them by HCPs and not feeling actively involved in the decision-making around their healthcare. The aim of this study is to explore reported experiences of healthcare services and to identify how adolescents can be empowered to feel safe and be safe when using health care services. More than 100 young people aged 12 - 25 took part in this research through outreach and engagement events at a University and College. In addition, ten focus groups were delivered in partnership with third sector organisations that support young people. These groups included young people that self-harm, from a Roma background, dealing with ill-mental health, young parents, not being in employment, education or training (Neet) and identifying as being autistic or neurodivergent. Use of evidence-based scenarios around preparing for health appointments, being in and activities after an appointment, were used for the engagement sessions. A thematic analysis will identify key challenges and opportunities for engaging with health care services to support patient empowerment and patient safety. The study is still ongoing but preliminary findings outlined that young people feel service accessibility is important to them but are discouraged by inconveniences and feelings of anxiety and feeling dismissed. Consequently, hesitancy is experienced when seeking further help which may impact on their safety. The study also showed that despite concerns expressed by young people over the accuracy of health-related information found on the internet and through social media platforms, most people used these to get health related information. We plan to develop, in collaboration with young adolescents, resources which can empower and improve their usage of healthcare services. We will also create materials that GPs and PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) teachers to promote healthcare utilisation to younger people.

Empowering Younger People To Access and Use Healthcare Safely

Gary Blake and Jenni Murray

Yorkshire & Humber Patient Research Collaboration

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What's the problem? Some examples:

- Once you reach 18, you are on your own. Without the right support, it can be difficult to know who to contact for help and how to do this. Even when you do know, there can be many barriers in the way that can put you off getting help. (*North East Autism Society*).
- Only 50% of young adults in the UK know what endometriosis is, and many health practitioners including GPs and A&E doctors don't recognise the symptoms, resulting in missed opportunities to stop suffering. (*Endometriosis UK*)
- Survey shows that only 12% of young people think the Government takes young people's mental health seriously. (*Young Minds*)

Aim of this study:

To explore young people's reported experiences of healthcare services and to identify how adolescents can be empowered to feel safe when using health care services.



What young people told us:

- Younger people use a variety of strategies before, during, and after appointments to navigate the challenges of engaging with the healthcare system and healthcare professionals. These strategies include searching the internet, making notes about symptoms, bringing parents to appointments, bypassing or avoiding the GP, seeking second opinions, and presenting at A&E. Young people hold clear expectations for how care should be delivered, - particularly regarding how GPs interact, listen, and provide support during consultations. When these expectations are not met, they often feel unheard and may become distrustful of care providers.
- In this project, young people share their ideas on how appointments could be made more successful, such as health practitioners demonstrating better active listening skills, reviewing notes before appointments, and taking time to clearly explain the available options.

What we did:

- During this study, we engaged with and involved more than 100 young people aged 12–25 from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. They helped us develop and deliver the study, participating through focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and other engagement activities.
- A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key challenges and opportunities for young people and healthcare practitioners to engage more effectively, supporting both patient empowerment and patient safety.

Next steps:

- Currently engaging with GPs to discuss feedback from young people and will use this information to co-produce lesson plans to be piloted in schools that promote healthcare utilisation among young people.
- Co-producing animations focusing on advice from young people around "making the most of your health appointments".

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Gary.Blake@bthft.nhs.uk
Jenni.Murray@bthft.nhs.uk