

Patients with disability have less positive experiences of hospital care

A new report by the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) reveals that among hospitalised patients in NSW, those with disability* have less positive experiences of care than patients without disability.

Patient Perspectives: Exploring experiences of hospital care for people with disability reveals, for the first time, insights into the experiences of people with disability in hospital. It provides survey responses from almost 9,000 adults with disability who were admitted to a NSW public hospital in 2015.

Patients with disability were significantly less positive than those without disability for 26 of the 48 survey questions in the report. There were no questions to which patients with disability answered significantly more positively.

BHI Acting Chief Executive Dr Kim Sutherland said the report shows all NSW patients receive good hospital care and patients with disability are no exception, with most rating their overall care as either 'very good' (63%) or 'good' (30%).

However, comparing the responses of patients with disability with those without showed small, but consistent gaps in the experiences of the two groups. "There are a number of results that highlight areas for improvement," Dr Sutherland said.

For example:

- 17% of patients with disability said they were not given the 'right amount' of information about their condition compared with 13% of patients without disability.
- 25% of patients with disability said doctors did not always explain things in an understandable way compared with 20% of patients without disability.
- 23% of patients with disability who needed help to eat their meals said they did not get enough help from staff compared with 20% of patients without disability.

Looking only at the experiences of patients in the disability group, the report shows significant variation across local health districts and hospitals.

"This variation tells us that some local health districts and hospitals are more successful at meeting the challenge of caring for people with disability – highlighting where there is potential for improvement," said Dr Sutherland.

"This report represents an important starting point for further investigation, and an opportunity for the health system to consider where improvements can be made. Capturing and amplifying the voices of people with disability will help to deliver better health outcomes for this vulnerable group."

* For the purposes of the report, the 'disability' group consisted of respondents who said they have any of five longstanding conditions: hearing impairment, sight impairment, learning disability, longstanding physical condition or neurological impairment.