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NSW Aboriginal patients' experiences of hospital care reported for the first time

A new report by the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) provides, for the first time, system-wide and detailed information about Aboriginal patients' experiences of hospital care in NSW.

Patient Perspectives: Hospital care for Aboriginal people shows that Aboriginal patients rated their care highly overall, however, they were less positive than non-Aboriginal patients for nearly half of the 55 survey questions included in the report.

The report provides responses from almost one in every 10 adult Aboriginal patients who were admitted to a NSW public hospital in 2014. It compares results between Aboriginal patients and non-Aboriginal patients as well as between Aboriginal groups across the state.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque said while 89% of Aboriginal patients rated the care they received in hospital as either very good or good, some significant variation in patients' experiences were evident – particularly for interpersonal aspects of care, such as respectfulness of staff.

"The widest gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients' responses were seen for whether enough privacy was given when discussing their condition or treatment, and whether doctors answered important questions in an understandable way," Dr Levesque said.

Aboriginal patients were less positive than non-Aboriginal patients for self-reported outcome measures:

- 22% of Aboriginal patients experienced a complication or problem related to their care compared with 16% of non-Aboriginal patients
- 70% of Aboriginal patients said the care they received definitely helped them compared with 77% of non-Aboriginal patients
- 66% of Aboriginal patients said the problem that prompted their hospital stay was much better at the time of survey completion compared with 73% of non-Aboriginal patients.

Some areas for improvement were highlighted by a significant number of Aboriginal patients:

- 23% said health professionals did not discuss their worries or fears with them
- 20% said they were not given enough information about their condition or treatment.

The report shows that gaps were not systemic, and results differed across local health districts.

Aboriginal patients in Sydney and Southern NSW were more positive about their care than Aboriginal people in NSW in general. Aboriginal patients from Nepean Blue Mountains and Western Sydney were less positive than Aboriginal patients in NSW in general.

Gaps in experiences of care between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients appear bigger in rural and remote areas, such as in Murrumbidgee and Western NSW.

"The benefits of care that we typically see in patient reported experiences in rural areas do not translate to Aboriginal patients in regional NSW," Dr Levesque said.

The report, local health district profiles and data are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

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