

Summary

Due to societal, political and economical developments and trends the role of the patient has become an important issue in healthcare. There is a growing understanding that patients view healthcare from a unique perspective. Information stemming from this perspective can be an important contribution to designing health care according to the wishes of the patients, and thereby increasing the quality of care.

By involving patients feedback can be gathered about patient experiences in healthcare. Theories concerning the effectiveness of feedback in relation to learning show factors that may enhance the effect of feedback. Active involvement of the professionals in generating feedback, confrontation with the complex reality and interaction with patients increases the effect on learning. Professionals are expected to listen to the patient and to let themselves be surprised and challenged by their stories. They are to look beyond their own perspective to find solutions to enhance patient-centered care.

Patients can be involved in many different ways. One example is the mirror meeting. In a mirror meeting professionals listen to patients talking about their experiences in healthcare. The research described in this thesis investigates the contribution of mirror meetings to improving the quality of health care. The research is of a qualitative and exploring nature. It describes the experiences of patients and healthcare professionals concerning mirror meetings. The research took place in the AMC, a large academic hospital in Amsterdam. In this hospital the mirror meeting was developed, and it is being used throughout the entire organisation. Besides observing mirror meetings and the subsequent discussion meetings, documents were analysed with regard to the development of the instrument. Patients that participated in the mirror meeting were interviewed, and so were professionals that had a listening role in the meeting. The research contained a quantitative element by means of a survey that was held amongst professionals at the end of the meeting. The results of the survey were used for describing the experiences of the professionals.

The results show that the mirror meeting is felt to be a powerful instrument. Listening to the experiences of patients being told by themselves, the physical presence in the meeting and listening without talking back increases the impact of the feedback given. Professionals value the information given by patients. The feedback exceeds the individual patient experience. The information from the mirror meetings leads to individual learning effects. Professionals are affected by the stories of the patients when performing their daily activities. In this way mirror meetings have a positive effect on focusing on patients preferences in healthcare. In order to perpetuate these effects and to make sure that the structure and organisation of healthcare profit from the feedback given, individual learning effects should be transformed to organizational learning. The observed part of the actions subsequent to the meetings indicates that this transformation is not all that obvious. Specific attention is needed to transform the energy and information gathered by the mirror meetings into specific changes in the provision of healthcare services that will cause a structural improvement.

