

The power of the #hashtag

Instigating change to theatre environments through social media

Being identifiable in theatre has a multitude of benefits—from improving communication to improving experiences of patients and reducing stress and anxiety in theatre.



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Change within the healthcare system

In an ever-evolving healthcare system, the need for adaptation and change is important. The changing demographic of patients accessing healthcare today compared to just twenty years ago is evident as is the response in terms of technological advancements in care provision and research. The need for change within healthcare is widely recognised and models such as the UK NHS change model, which aims to transform, develop and achieve change to improve patient experiences and safety have been produced (NHS England Sustainable Improvement Team 2012). While change models are usually utilised at corporate or management level to bring about change within a hospital trust or across the healthcare system as a whole, this top-down approach to change can and often does take time to disseminate through the workforce. Initial drivers for change can be lost as the workforce does not usually have an active role in instigating the proposed change idea. Sometimes within healthcare an idea for change comes along, which is brought about by frontline staff and often referred to as a bottom-up approach to change. This kind of change can happen much faster within a workforce as the proposed change is usually patient-focused instead of being service-led which, more often than not, top-down change proposals are.

'Bottom-up' approach to change

Until recently the bottom-up or grassroots campaign or initiative for change has been difficult to instigate as healthcare workers usually work within one sector within a hospital and are limited in terms of dissemination of a change idea across a trust and even more restricted in terms of being heard from higher up the management ranks. However, the use of social media over the past decade has seen an increase in the number of healthcare change campaigns in the form

of hashtag campaigns. This has enabled the frontline work force to be more active in spreading the word, and the accessibility social media brings in terms of inter-trust relations seems to be a valuable asset to the bottom-up change approach. Another benefit to social media is that hierarchical barriers are often broken down, allowing students such as myself to be proactive in facilitating change not just within one trust but on an international level.

Hashtag campaigns and initiatives are more and more being recognised as a reputable way of raising awareness of change or where change is needed within the healthcare system. One very poignant social media campaign, which inspired me as a student, was that of fellow student midwife, Hannah Tizard. Hannah's #BloodToBaby campaign helped in raising awareness of the importance of delaying clamping and cutting of the umbilical cord after birth. This campaign was formally endorsed by the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the change in national guidance and policy has arisen from this (Tizard and Burleigh 2016). Other important hashtag campaigns include the #HelloMyNameIs campaign by the late Dr. Kate Granger and husband Chris Pointon and the #SkinToSkin campaign by midwife Jenny Clarke. Campaigns such as these are usually born from observing current practice routines and seeing a need for change or from personal experiences. The power of social media in the spreading of a popular hashtag campaign has been experienced by myself over the past year as my #TheatreCapChallenge campaign went viral, spreading across the world to countries as far as Australia, America and China.

#TheatreCapChallenge: a hashtag is born

At Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Trust (LTHTR), delivery suite manager, Emma Gornall, and the team have been working hard to improve birthing