

Out of Hours

GPs: Behind Closed Doors

Practice reflections on appearing on national TV

When we were first approached and asked if we wanted to be filmed for a documentary to be shown on national TV, it elicited many different emotions: mainly trepidation, but also excitement and a sense of duty to create some positive PR for general practice. Over the coming weeks, contracts were negotiated to ensure that the contributors could have some say in what would be shown and we eventually came to an agreement with the production company. In February 2014 *GPs: Behind Closed Doors* was filmed at St Johns Medical Centre in Lewisham, south-east London. We'd like to share some of our reflections and learning with you.

THE PRACTICE

By putting our heads above the parapet, we were able to show to our peers and, most importantly, our patients that we work hard and strive to do a good job. What does a good job mean? Being CQC compliant, with a high QOF attainment and generally good reviews on NHS choices are all relevant, but more importantly people were able to see first hand that we deliver patient-centred care. However, the experience did highlight the areas in which we need to improve, such as the limited availability of appointments, which is the primary cause for less than satisfactory levels of customer service in reception.

As a practice of around 12 500 patients, we have a team of receptionists, admin staff,

and clinical staff. While not everyone agreed to be filmed (about one-third of clinical staff and half of all other staff), staff dynamics definitely improved: less squabbling, higher productivity, and everyone just seemed happier. This team spirit was epitomised and led by the two trainees who agreed to be filmed. If they had not agreed to filming, we never would have made the show (the producers needed a minimum of four doctors), and with their bravery other doctors subsequently agreed also.

THE PATIENTS

Our patients were the real stars of the show, and about 150 per week agreed to be filmed. While our concern at the outset was for how clinicians might come across, we became more and more aware that some patients were at risk of coming across badly and being subject to public criticism. Our duty of care was suddenly extended into a new area, and we were well supported by the production crew in ensuring that every patient who was filmed had given informed consent prior to filming and had the right to change their mind immediately after the consultation.

We had four complaints related to the filming process while it was happening but none since, and we have been overwhelmed with positive feedback through correspondence from colleagues and patients, social media, and new patient

registrations. We have also seen better engagement from some patients who had previously been reluctant to seek help from a GP. The most touching story is of a woman with Crohn's disease who sent a letter to one of our patients via the surgery offering moral support with their colostomy decision.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Reflecting on consulting skills by filming and reviewing is not a new concept for GPs and was an obvious direct benefit of agreeing to making the show. The focus, though, was not the usual reflection on how things could have been done better, but whether we would be happy with the care that was given and was borne of the fact that we would be under external scrutiny.

Another lesson was learned on the finer points of patient confidentiality. The presence of cameras amplified the need to not have conversations in corridors and subsequently maintain patient confidentiality when speaking with anyone who had seen the show and wanted to know more about a particular patient.

THE PROFESSION

One criticism put to us after broadcast was that we failed to show the intensity of GP work: the hours spent doing paperwork, home visits, and countless meetings. We fully agree, but our response is that, to gain public support, we can't complain about how tough we have it. That argument should be saved for policy makers and politicians. For the public, we have to show the good that we do, how invaluable we are to our communities, and how we are motivated to enhance the wellbeing of our patients.

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You can watch episodes of *GPs: Behind Closed Doors* at: <http://www.channel5.com/shows/gps-behind-closed-doors>

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GPs: Behind Closed Doors. Image Courtesy of Channel 5 and Knickerbockerglory Ltd.

