A Patient Reported Experience Measure (PREM) for use by older people in community services

E. A. Teale, J. B. Young

Abstract

Background: intermediate care (IC) services operate between health and social care and are an essential component of integrated care for older people. Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) offer an objective measure of user experience and a practical way to measure person-centred, integrated care in IC settings.

Objective: to describe the development of PREMs suitable for use in IC services and to examine their feasibility, acceptability and scaling properties.

Setting: 131 bed-based and 143 home-based or re-ablement IC services in England.

Methods: PREMs for each of home- and bed-based IC services were developed through consensus. These were incorporated into the 2013 NAIC and distributed to 50 consecutive users of each bed-based and 250 users of each home-based service. Return rates and patterns of missing data were examined. Scaling properties of the PREMs were examined with Mokken analysis.

Results: 1,832 responses were received from users of bed-based and 4,627 from home-based services (return rates 28 and 13%, respectively). Missing data were infrequent. Mokken analysis of completed bed-based PREMs (1,398) revealed 8 items measuring the same construct and forming a medium strength (Loevinger $H = 0.44$) scale with acceptable reliability ($\rho = 0.76$). Analysis of completed home-based PREMs (3,392 records) revealed a medium-strength scale of 12 items (Loevinger $H = 0.41$) with acceptable reliability ($\rho = 0.81$).
Introduction

Health and care services internationally are planning and implementing services to address the increasing proportion of older people within populations. Developing and improving community services is a central component of this response, and intermediate care (IC) is a generic term that describes an important grouping of similar services providing ‘care closer to home’ for older people. Key functions of IC services are to provide an alternative to emergency hospital admission, to expedite timely discharge from hospital, and, through a short period of intensive support, prevent admission to long-term institutional care. As these services operate between secondary and primary care within the NHS, and between the NHS and local government, it is important that separate clinical governance structures are in place to monitor the quality and safety of services. In England, this has been addressed in part through the National Audit of Intermediate Care [1]. It was considered important in the audit design to include information obtained directly from service users. One type of measure considered was to use a service satisfaction questionnaire. However, this approach has been criticised as lacking rigour and providing false reassurance of service quality as service users typically report high levels of satisfaction but may have received poor care [2]. On the other hand, Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) are considered more objective as the questions are designed to encourage the user to describe their actual experience of the care received [3]. Effective IC services are considered an essential mechanism for improving the integration of health and care services for older people [4] and improving outcomes for the health and care system as a whole. Integrated care has been defined as care that is ‘person centred and co-ordinated’ [5]. Service users are in the strongest position to comment on this practical definition of integration, and PREMs have therefore been included as one of five key metrics to assess integration nationally in England [6]. This paper describes the development of PREMs suitable for use in IC community services. The main findings from the IC-PREMs are reported in the 2013 National Audit of Intermediate Care report [1]. We present data describing the feasibility and acceptability of the measures, examine the extent to which the PREM items may be converted to a numerical score (the scaling properties of the questionnaires) and offer suggestions for future improvements.

Methods

IC services are heterogeneous but can be broadly divided into bed-based (for example community hospitals) and home-based (for example hospital-at-home) services. To reflect these sub-types of IC, two PREMs were developed.

Development of the PREMs

The two intermediate care PREMs (IC-PREMs) were developed by a Delphi consensus process performed by email with a panel of IC experts (the National Audit of Intermediate Care (NAIC) Steering Group); a panel of IC practitioners (NAIC Participant Reference Group); a patient and public group (co-ordinated by the Patients’ Association); and representation from the Picker Institute.

Forty-one questions from the 2008 Picker Adult Inpatient Survey bank of 80 questions had face validity for bed- or home-based IC services [7]. These questions had therefore all previously satisfied cognitive and acceptability testing procedures. These were circulated to the consensus group (29 people) with instructions to identify items felt relevant to each of home- or bed-based IC settings. Suggestions for new questions to cover aspects of IC not encompassed by existing items were requested at this stage. Sixteen responses resulted in two long lists of questions: including suggestions for novel questions, there were 45 candidate questions for bed-based services and 40 for home-based services. In the second round, the two long lists of questions were re-circulated to the panels with instructions to identify the 20 most relevant questions for each of the two IC-PREMs. Fifteen responses were obtained. From these responses, the fifteen questions most frequently identified as relevant were extracted and formed the IC-PREMs (Figure 1). Wording of the questions was modified to create ‘T’ statements in line with the recommendations of National Voices [3]. The questionnaires were sent to Patients’ Association Ambassadors and five recent users of IC services for comments and feedback. Feedback regarding language, layout, font and clarification of content were incorporated into the final questionnaires. The final versions of the PREMs were field tested in three sites prior to adoption in the audit and are provided as an Supplementary data, available in Age and Ageing online.

IC-PREM testing

The IC-PREMs were incorporated into the 2013 NAIC [1]. Approximately half of the NHS in England registered to participate in the audit (92 commissioners; 202 provider organisations; 535 IC services) and included separate organisational and service user components. The service user audit occurred between May and August 2013. For bed-based IC services, the IC-PREM was included as part of the service user questionnaire pack. At discharge, the IC-PREM (bed based) was
detected and handed to 50 consecutive bed-based service users from each participating service. Recipients were provided with a prepaid envelope to return the completed PREM questionnaire. For the participating home-based IC services (including both social care re-ablement and healthcare hospital-at-home services), service managers were sent 250 PREM questionnaires and prepaid envelopes to distribute to service users at discharge from their service. A barcode linked the PREM form to the service, but the PREM forms contained no identifiers of individual service users. As PREM returns were anonymous and results used for service evaluation/improvement, ethical approval from a research ethics committee was not sought.

Analysis

The bed-based and the home-based PREMs were considered separately. The questions each had between 2, 3 and 4 response categories, but the responses were summarised to provide a dichotomous ‘problem score’, the approach suggested by the Picker Europe [8]. Using this scoring method, user responses indicating that care could have been improved are coded as a ‘problem’ (e.g. where an aspect of care did not occur, occurred sometimes, or where there was poor experience of care). In contrast, where good care was always received, where particular aspects of care were not applicable or where poor care was never experienced were coded as ‘no problem’ and ascribed a score of ‘1’. Higher scores indicate a better report of care experience, with lower scores highlighting areas for service improvement.

Acceptability and feasibility of the two IC-PREMs were assessed by return rates and the volumes and patterns of missing data. Scalability of the IC-PREMs was explored with Mokken analysis (non-parametric item response theory (NIRT) [9]). For these analyses, ‘don’t know’ responses were coded missing. Records with missing responses were excluded for the purposes of the Mokken scaling analyses. To form a meaningful scale for a set of questions, they must all measure the same underlying construct—the latent trait, in this case user experience. This property of a set of questions is called unidimensionality and is assessed through calculation of Looviger H statistics [10]. An item Looviger H coefficient (H) >0.3 suggests the item should be retained in the scale, providing it makes clinical sense. Stepwise item selection algorithms using the mokken package in R freeware were used for this procedure [11]. A summary Looviger H coefficient for the overall scale (H) was also calculated: 0.3–0.4 indicates a weak scale, 0.4–0.5 is moderate and >0.5 indicates a strong scale.

Valid Mokken analysis requires items to be locally independent: answers from previous questions should not influence subsequent responses. This is particularly relevant where ‘learning’ from questions may occur over the course
of a test [10]. The underlying trait of ‘experience’ should not be influenced in this way and we have therefore assumed local independence of items.

Providing each question meets monotonicity, unidimensionality and local independence assumptions, a total score for the instrument may be calculated by summing the responses from each question. Crohnbach’s alpha is considered to underestimate reliability of scales in NIRT analyses [12]. Having confirmed non-intersection of item characteristic curves, the coefficient of reliability rho (ρ) was calculated [10]; a cut-off value of 0.7 was taken to indicate acceptable reliability of the scale [13]. All analyses were performed using R freeware [11].

**Results**

Two hundred and two providers of IC services participated in the audit. Table 1 shows the number of services, participants and responses to the PREM questionnaires. Return rates for the bed-based, home-based and re-ablement PREM questionnaires were 28.0, 12.6 and 13.7%, respectively. An overall return rate of 15.3% was achieved (Table 1).

**Bed-based PREM**

Missing data for individual questions were infrequent: fewer than 5% of responses for all questions were missing apart from the question ‘the staff that cared for me in this service had been given all the necessary information about my condition or illness by the person who referred me’, where 1.0% of responses were missing and 12.0% ‘don’t know’.

After removal of records with absent responses, there were 1,398 questionnaires available for Mokken analysis. Eight items have H; values exceeding 0.3, and these are shown in Table 2. The overall Loevinger H for this scale of 8 items is 0.44, indicating moderate scaling properties. For these 8 items, there is no violation of monotonicity assumptions. The coefficient of reliability (ρ) is 0.76, indicating acceptable reliability [13] (there were no invariant item ordering violations to suggest intersection of item response curves). Response scores from these eight questions may be summed to give a total score out of 8. The remaining items did not form a separate subscale on further analysis, and these items were discarded.

**Home-based PREM**

In common with the bed-based PREM, missing data were infrequent (<6%) apart from the same question relating to staff having received the necessary information from the referrer for which 1.7% or responses were missing, and 11.4% ‘don’t know’.

After removal of incomplete records, 3,392 responses remained for analysis. Items with Loevinger H coefficients (H;) >0.3 are shown in Table 3. The item appointment times were convenient had an H; of 0.30; removal of this item resulted in improved H; values for the remaining items in the scale, and the item was therefore excluded. Twelve items were retained in the scale. Monotonicity assumptions for these 12 items were met. The reliability of the scale (ρ) is 0.81 (there were no significant violations of invariant item ordering), and the overall scale H = 0.41, indicating moderate scalability. Individual item response scores for these questions may be summed to give an overall ‘experience’ score out of 12.

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**Table 1. Number of services, participants and responses to the PREM questionnaires**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of services</th>
<th>Target number of participants</th>
<th>PREMs returned</th>
<th>Return rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bed based</strong></td>
<td>131</td>
<td>6,550</td>
<td>1,832</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home based</strong></td>
<td>95</td>
<td>23,750</td>
<td>2,983</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Re-ablement</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1,644</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>274</td>
<td>42,300</td>
<td>6,459</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Home-based and re-ablement services are considered together for the purposes of the Mokken analysis.

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**Table 2. Loevinger H; coefficients for Mokken analysis of the bed-based PREM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>H;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Staff have sufficient info</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Involvement in goal setting</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Questions answered</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Confidence in staff</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Involved in discharge dec</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Home circumstances consid</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Information provided for family</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Treated with dignity</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (H)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(The Loevinger H; is a measure of unidimensionality; whether or not an item is measuring the underlying trait. 0.3–0.4 indicates a weak scale, 0.4–0.5 is moderate and >0.5, a strong scale.)*

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**Table 3. Loevinger H; coefficients for Mokken analysis of the home-based PREM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>H;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Staff have sufficient info</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Aware of goals</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Involvement in goal setting</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Aware of how to contact staff</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Questions answered</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Confidence in staff</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Involved in decisions to discharge</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Given enough notice about discharge</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Information provided for family</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Requirement for additional equipment discussed</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Discussion regarding further services after discharge</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Treated with dignity and respect</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (H)</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(The Loevinger H; is a measure of unidimensionality; whether or not an item is measuring the underlying trait. 0.3–0.4 indicates a weak scale, 0.4–0.5 is moderate and >0.5, a strong scale.)*

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Discussion

Understanding services from a user perspective is critical in the delivery of person-centred, integrated care. Successful rehabilitation should be based on goal-directed and individualised care [14]. Person-centred care is therefore especially important in IC services where rehabilitation is a major component of care. The systematic and routine evaluation of person-centred care requires robustly developed assessment tools. The two IC PREMs were developed with these requirements in mind. They utilised existing questions that had undergone prior sense and field testing. Specific question selection involved a consensus process with panels of patients and public, practitioners, managers and academics. The PREMs were developed to be used across a spectrum of IC services for the purposes of local service improvement rather than between service comparisons.

Return rates, acceptability and scalability were investigated by incorporating the PREMs into the 2013 National Audit of Intermediate Care [1]. This was a large audit involving over 250 services and over 6,000 patients. Return rates for both the bed-based and home-based PREMs were low (28 and 13% respectively), though bed-based return rates were comparable with other national surveys (Friends and Family Test 36.9% [15]). Higher return rates for the bed-based survey may reflect the different distribution methods of the questionnaires: PREMs for bed-based service users were distributed at discharge by hand; home-based service users received their questionnaires by post or by hand. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to the manager of each home-based service; the actual number of these questionnaires distributed to users to complete was not recorded. The seemingly low return rates for the home-based PREM may be explained by fewer than expected users receiving questionnaires to complete. The NAIC was an anonymous survey and demographic information for individual service users cannot be linked to their PREM responses. Therefore, whether service users completing the PREM were representative of typical users of IC could not be assessed, a possible source of selection bias.

The PREMs were acceptable to users, as reflected in the generally low rates of missing data. The findings also indicated that the IC-PREMs were sensitive to differentiated care experiences. The overall care experience was excellent (>95% of patients reported they had been treated with dignity and respect), but more focussed questions relating to the experience of involvement with decision processes (treatment decisions, discharge planning and goal setting) was weaker. This is an important aspect of person-centred care and the information is highly relevant to professionals and service managers seeking to improve their services. Indeed, patient participation in care planning is increasingly recognised as a key contributor to patient safety and high-quality care [16]. Our findings suggest that the IC-PREMS might have utility in informing these types of service improvement decisions.

The IC-PREMs were generally well completed (<6% missing or don’t know responses). However, the question ‘staff that cared for me in this service had been given all the necessary information about my condition or illness by the person who referred me’ was poorly completed in both bed- and home-based IC-PREMs (12 and 11.4% of respondents reporting ‘don’t know’ to this question). It is perhaps not surprising that individuals in receipt of a service felt unable to comment on whether information about their condition passed between healthcare professionals was adequate. Rewording to reflect the service user’s perception of staffs’ understanding of their condition may improve acceptability of this item.

Mokken analysis was performed to examine the ordinal scaling properties of the two IC-PREMs. This determined that eight items for the bed-based PREM, and twelve items for the home-based PREM, were related to a single construct of user experience. Both scales are moderate in terms of their scaling properties, and important modelling assumptions were met. This means it is valid to combine the response scores for these questions to produce an overall service experience score. This could be utilised in the future to facilitate within and between service comparisons. As Mokken analysis is a non-parametric technique, any subsequent statistical analyses of total PREM scores must, in turn, be non-parametric.

Conclusion

Two IC-PREMs have been developed and offer a method routinely to evaluate the delivery of person-centred care in home- and bed-based IC settings. For each IC-PREM, Mokken analysis has identified a subgroup of items where scores may be summed to give an overall measure of ‘user experience’. The IC-PREMs therefore offer a unique and quantifiable insight into the experience of users of IC services. Our findings suggest that the IC-PREMs might have utility in identifying areas for service development, such as user involvement in treatment decisions, to improve the delivery of co-ordinated and integrated IC.

Key points

- IC-PREMs offer an objective measure of user experience of IC services.
- The IC-PREM may identify areas for service development to improve the delivery of IC.
- Individual item scores from the IC-PREMs may be summed to provide an overall user experience score.

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Conflicts of interest
None declared.

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No additional funding was sought for this analysis. The IC-PREMs were incorporated into the 2013 NAIC within the existing subscription model operating with individual commissioning groups.

Supplementary data
Supplementary data mentioned in the text are available to subscribers in Age and Ageing online.

References

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