
POSTER ABSTRACT**Understanding the Impact of Volunteers on Patient Care in Rehabilitation: A Staff Perspective**

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Background: Volunteers are an essential part of the healthcare workforce and the WHO includes volunteers in its definition of healthcare workers as ‘people engaged in actions whose primary intent is to enhance health’. Volunteers engage directly with patients and provide essential support services that might otherwise not be delivered. While volunteer engagement has been shown to improve patient well-being across a variety of settings, there is a lack of research exploring the impact of volunteers on the delivery of care in rehabilitation settings. This study aims to explore the role of volunteers and their impact on service delivery from the perspectives of staff at a complex specialist rehabilitation hospital.

Approach: Purposive sampling was used to identify members of staff who had engaged with the volunteer service. A survey, employing a mix of Likert scale responses and open text boxes was distributed to participants (n=135) and 59 responses (43.7%) were collected. Descriptive statistics were produced, and open text boxes were analysed using an inductive approach to thematic analysis.

Results: Results indicate that 77% of participants are very satisfied with the support provided by volunteers and 91% of participants believe that volunteer engagement improves patient care. Volunteers were described by participants as “essential” and suggest they provide “invaluable companionship and compassion towards patients”. Despite satisfaction with the volunteer service, 39% of participants believe there are certain barriers which impede volunteers’ ability to provide support. Barriers include volunteers not having basic access to hospital IT systems, as well as a lack of time for staff to meet with and train volunteers.

Implications: Highlighting the impact of volunteers on the delivery of healthcare has meaningful implications for the development of the healthcare workforce. Volunteers typically come from a diverse range of backgrounds and therefore offer a unique and varied set of skills and insights. This study highlights valuable feedback from members of staff and underscores the value of volunteers as part of the rehabilitation workforce, while also identifying structural barriers that

health systems must address to maximise their impact. Insights from this study hold relevance for rehabilitation and integrated care settings globally.

By highlighting the value and impact of volunteers on the delivery of high-quality care, this study will influence the development of a more sustainable and integrated workforce in rehabilitation, ultimately leading to the provision of better outcomes and better care.