

PANORAMA PEOPLE

Interview with Irina Kalinina on crowdsourcing public feedback for improving polyclinics in Moscow, the Russian Federation

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Patient complaints and long waiting times, coupled with the growing popularity of private medical services as an alternative to the city's health centre network, have sent a signal to the Moscow Department of Healthcare that measures need to be taken to meet the needs of patients. As part of its large-scale efforts to involve the public in the discussion of primary health care services provided in the city, the Department used crowdsourcing to collect suggestions on the improvements that need to be made. We talked to Dr Kalinina, a freelance specialist on the management of nursing practices at the Directorate for the Coordination of the Activities of Medical Organizations of the Moscow Department of Healthcare (in the South-Eastern Administrative District of Moscow), member of the board of the Regional Public Organization of Moscow Nurses and the Chief Nurse at State Budgetary Healthcare Institution Diagnostic Centre No. 3 of the Moscow Department of Health, about the campaign and its results.

What was the impetus for this initiative?

Only a few years ago, most people did not exactly have a positive view of Moscow's health centres: never-ending queues, toilets that don't work, problems getting your medical record, difficulties booking an appointment, the impossibility of getting in to see a specialist – the list goes on. It is, thus, unsurprising that most Muscovites were unhappy with the services provided in our health centres. We also received complaints regarding accessibility for people with limited mobility and the services offered to those requiring palliative care. Something had to be done. This is why the government of Moscow developed an appropriate programme for improving the quality of our services – the “Moscow Health Centre Standard.” The first step in the development of this programme was crowdsourcing – pooling the opinions of Moscow residents on how they would like to see the city's health centres.

How did you go about developing the crowdsourcing survey?

Before the project was launched, there was no feedback mechanism as such for patients, and there was no formal way of gauging their opinions. Patients would just take their complaints immediately to the chief physician or head of department.

The “My Health Centre” project was developed in 2015. The objectives of the project are to gather and study proposals from both patients and healthcare workers on how to improve the

work of health centres, reduce waiting times, cut down on the number of unnecessary visits to the doctor and ultimately change the image of Moscow healthcare.

Tell us a little about how the crowdsourcing project was carried out.

We received over 27,000 unique suggestions through the portal. An expert group made up of health workers, chief physicians at health centres and members of a working group created by the Moscow Department of Healthcare was then set up. The expert group selected proposals on the basis of these discussions that covered the most important areas for improvement. These proposals were elaborated further before being submitted to a public vote on the “Active Citizen” portal. And the proposals that received the most votes from Moscow residents were selected for priority implementation.

What were the results of the campaign?

The Moscow Healthcare Department used the priority areas identified as a result of the project to develop the “Moscow Health Centre Standard” programme for improving the quality of our services. Three health centres took part in a pilot programme before it was introduced on a wider scale. Changes made during the course of the pilot programme gave us an idea of what worked in practice and what did not. Some things changed during the programme's implementation. Gradually, more and more health centres became part of the project,

building on the experience of the pilot institutions. The final, comprehensive and battle-tested standard was then introduced at all of the city's healthcare institutions. It is important to note that the scale on which the standard was implemented in health centres differed according to their size, type, capacities, number of patients and budget.

As of the time of speaking, all health centres in the capital have transitioned to the new standard, and all health workers understand what is expected of them in terms of their work – from talking politely with the patient to the correct organization of their workspace and performance of their duties.

Could you describe the new standard in the provision of care at Moscow's health centres?

The aim of the standard is to improve the quality of treatment and care, increase patient satisfaction and the effectiveness of the work of medical staff, and ultimately change the image of Moscow healthcare.

And these changes are not hard to spot, as they start at the front doorstep of the healthcare institution. The open space at the entrance to the health centre is arranged in such a way as to immediately put the patient at ease. The lobby now boasts a water cooler and a vending machine, and the waiting areas have comfortable furniture and televisions. Our health centres are now cosy and warm, just like at home.

The Moscow Standard includes mechanisms for reducing queues, improving the work of the registrar and increasing the effectiveness of the work carried out by healthcare workers, as well as the quality and availability of medical care.

Measures to improve the effectiveness of the work carried out by healthcare workers include: simplifying the procedure for issuing subsidized prescriptions for patients with chronic illnesses and creating teams for home visits. The latter initiative has made it possible to increase therapist shifts from 4–5 to 8 hours and individual consultation times from 10 to 15 minutes. These teams are equipped with vehicles and all the necessary equipment (a wide variety of medicines, a blood glucose meter and a portable ECG) to ensure high-quality home care. This makes it possible, for example, to monitor the condition of patients with cardiovascular diseases and take these indicators into account when providing treatment.

Another innovation is the creation of the “Standard Patient Pathway,” which starts at the entrance area. Under this system, the patient is greeted by an administrator who is able to answer

any questions the patient may have and ensure that they see the correct specialist. No longer does the patient have to go to the registrar to get their medical record, as it is delivered to the doctor before the scheduled appointment.

A system has been introduced whereby patients can be seen by nursing staff (without the participation of a doctor) at a “nursing station.” Nursing staff can issue medical documents (various certificates, referrals to health resorts, etc.), measure blood pressure and carry out other procedures that do not require the participation of a doctor. These visits account for up to 50% of all patient appointments, and holding them at a “nursing station” significantly reduces the burden on doctors and allows them to engage in the treatment of patients directly. Nurses at the “nursing station” can help patients book an appointment with a doctor, provide explanations on specific issues and recommend specialists.

How is patient feedback provided?

Patient feedback is covered by a separate set of measures in the Moscow Health Centre Standard. Patients who have a personal account on the web portal receive a text message from the chief physician the day after their appointment asking them to evaluate the work of the clinic. Patients can also leave their comments.

Health centres have a feedback desk, where anyone can write their suggestions, comments and messages. New feedback tools are being introduced: smiley feedback counters and an “text message assessment service.” In both cases, patients will be able to immediately share their impressions about their appointment by pressing the corresponding smiley or sending a free text message. All the information received is then analysed by the management team, and if the actions of a health worker have given cause for concern, then various sanctions may be applied against them. Getting feedback from the public on the work of our health centres is an integral part of the new Standard.

The introduction of the Moscow Health Centre Standard has made healthcare more accessible and provided doctors with more time to assess their patients. It has also made visiting the doctor a more comfortable experience for patients and increased the attractiveness of medical institutions for patients.

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