

Using a multidisciplinary World Café to engage patients to co-design quality improvement ideas surrounding elective caesarean section service provision

Dr Trina Ratnasingham
Dr Victoria Ferrier
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

Introduction

Service-user engagement and multi-disciplinary collaboration are aspirational goals in healthcare improvement. Involvement of end-point service-users, however, often occurs after the focus and direction of projects have been chosen. This limits their influence, prioritizing clinician and management-driven goals rather than patient-centred change. World Cafes are a ‘simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue’¹. Our anaesthetic and maternity departments, with Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnerships, jointly organised a World Café, to engage patients to identify areas of strength and weakness in the service provision of elective caesarean sections (EICS) and co-design quality improvement projects. Our aim was to shift away from traditional quality improvement models, towards one where ‘solutions are built from shared knowledge and lived experiences’².

Aims

1. Identify how service-users feel about the World Café format
2. Identify areas of strength in our EICS service provision
3. Identify areas to improve in our EICS service provision
4. Identify if service-users felt anxious about their anaesthesia
5. Identify if the experience met the service-users’ expectations
6. Identify service-users’ ideal EICS service provision

Method

Ethical approval was not required as attendance denoted implicit consent and the data collected was anonymised and aggregated.

As per their suggestion, the World Café format was adapted to suit our service-users and aims.

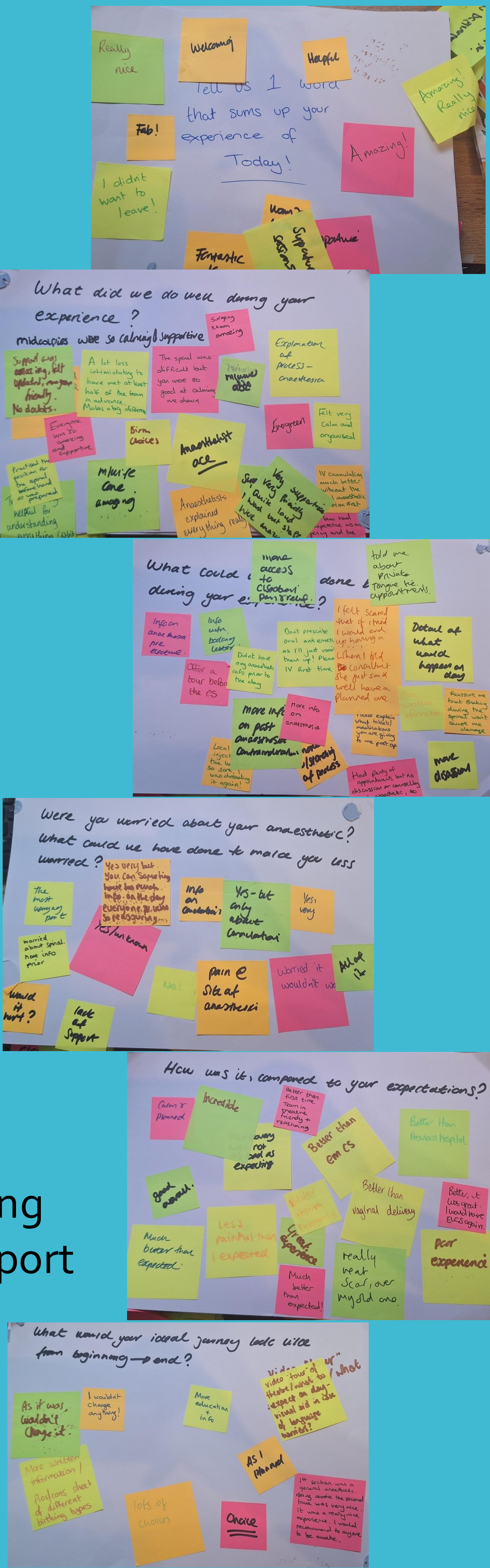
A church hall was chosen as the venue, due to several benefits that it offered:

- Free parking enabled service-users to arrive when it would suit them at minimal cost
- The non-clinical nature of the venue enabled it to feel more welcoming to service-users, creating less of a barrier between healthcare workers and service-users and potentially empowering service-users to be more honest with their feedback
- As the venue hosted Baby and Toddler sessions, they had pre-existing equipment that we could utilise to make it more mother-and-baby-friendly, such as soft mats on the floor and age-appropriate toys
- Due to the venue hosting Baby and Toddler groups previously, there were appropriate facilities such as areas to change a baby’s nappy if needed
- We provided food and beverages, to create a welcoming, informal atmosphere
- It was a ‘drop in and leave when you need to’ session, allowing service-users to leave when they felt they needed to address their baby’s needs
- It was advertised online and through leaflets at clinics.

Results

41 service-users expressed interest in attending.
24 service-users attended the adapted World Café.

1. The feedback on the World Café format was entirely positive
2. There was positive feedback on staff members and their ability to reassure the service-users
3. Areas to improve included suggestions of providing written information in relation to spinal anaesthesia before the day of surgery; providing a tour of the department; better access to pain relief; more time for discussion; more information about risks relating to spinal anaesthesia; more information about which medications are prescribed post-operatively
4. Significant anxiety around spinal anaesthesia was expressed
5. One service-user had a bad birthing experience and was directed to support and follow-up. All others reported that it exceeded their expectations.
6. Key themes: more written Information; more choice; and a tour (virtual or in person)



Conclusion

Utilising patient engagement to focus the direction of the quality improvement represents a vital area that is underutilized by clinicians. The execution of the World Café both demonstrated patient desire for projects already identified by clinicians, but also identified other necessary areas of improvement that had not previously been recognised by clinicians. This demonstrates the benefits of utilising service-users to focus the direction of quality improvement projects, aiding in using clinical resources effectively and improving patient outcomes and experiences.

Limitations

There were some limitations that require recognition. Firstly, the information regarding the World Café and its advertising was provided in English. This may have excluded patients with language barriers from participating. Secondly, due to the nature of World Cafes, there is a possibility that patients with mental health illnesses, such as postpartum depression, may not have felt able to participate. Despite these important limitations to the World Café format, it is a pivotal tool for empowering service-users, centering their insight and using their experiences, which ‘creates a better chance of creating services that meet people’s needs, improving their experience and outcomes’³.

References:

1. The World Café Community Community Foundation. ‘World Café Method’. Available at <https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/> [last accessed 28/04/2026]

2. Patient Experience Agency. ‘The Fundamentals of Co-Design in Healthcare’. Published in November 25, 2024. Available at <https://www.patientexperienceagency.com.au/blog/fundamentals-of-co-design-in-healthcare> [last accessed 28/04/2026]

3. NHS England. ‘Working in partnership with people and communities: Statutory guidance’. Last updated April 17, 2026. Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/working-in-partnership-with-people-and-communities-statutory-guidance/#who-is-this-guidance-for> [last accessed 28/04/2026]