Patients at the heart of the microsystem: Patients perspectives of safety and quality in general practice in Australia

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Background: As patients comprise one of the 5 P’s of the microsystem, their views about the remaining four components; the purpose, processes, professionals and patterns is highly important. Obtaining an in depth understanding of patients’ perspectives of the safety and quality of the microsystem is vital to improving the care they receive.

Aim: A study to explore patients’ views of safety and quality was undertaken with patients in the general practice setting in rural Australia. While in Australia the concept of clinical microsystems is new to general practice, it is often the first point of contact with the healthcare system for the majority of people, therefore it is of value to identify what matters to patients and why in this setting.

Methods: Frequent users of general practice were recruited into the study via community sources such as allied health and community health settings. These patients were chronically ill, on repeat medications or elderly. Patients who agreed to take part in the study participated in focus groups held across south east Australia.

Findings: Preliminary findings from focus groups with rural patients’ have identified a range of safety and quality indicators that are considered to be important to patients’. These include timely access to services, choice in provider, continuity of care, professional and personal competence, referral systems and coordination of care, relationships and communication, and patient engagement in care.

Conclusions: These preliminary findings demonstrate that viewing the microsystem through a patient lens can uncover new insights into safety and quality, and confirm what is most important about the care they receive.