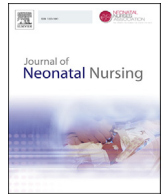




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Original Article

A framework analysis of free-text data from the neonatal survey 2014

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To systematically analyse parents' free-text comments provided in a survey about their experiences of neonatal care.

Methods: Using framework analysis of free-text data from the survey, a thematic framework was developed for coding 3738 comments. Most themes had positive and negative subcategories. Comments within the most frequently coded themes were re-coded into sub-themes to provide a more detailed insight into parents' experiences.

Results: Three quarters of comments referred to the 'care from staff' (n = 2447) with the majority (81%) being positive. Of these comments, a large proportion were 'general' or about positive 'staff behaviour/attitude'. The most frequently coded comments on parents' negative experiences focused on relationships formed with staff, specifically, information and communication (n = 734).

Conclusions: Neonatal units wishing to understand how best to improve parents' experiences would benefit from including an open-ended question in surveys of parents and reviewing these alongside the quantitative data.

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Introduction

Neonatal units specialise in the care of babies born early, with low weight, or with a medical condition that require specialised treatment, or surgical intervention. Nearly one in eight babies born in England and Wales needs neonatal care and the length of a baby's stay may vary from days to weeks or months, depending on their needs (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2015). The importance of ensuring that neonatal care is family-centred and parent-focused has been increasingly recognised (Department of Health, 2009; Gooding et al., 2011). Assessing parents' experiences of neonatal services is crucial for an understanding of how the quality of care can be improved. Previous research has shown parents' experiences of neonatal care, and the extent to which services are 'family-centred', can vary enormously between units (Burger et al., 2015; POPPY Steering Group, 2009).

Surveys of patient experiences of health care services provide one source of evidence about the quality of care. In health surveys the inclusion of an open-ended question for respondents to provide free-text comments is widespread, although the analysis and use of

these responses is less common (Rich et al., 2013). Previous research on the value of open-ended comments to staff has shown that they can complement quantitative data by highlighting the issues of priority to patients (Corner et al., 2013), increase understanding of experiences not captured by closed survey questions (Bracher et al., 2014; Maramba et al., 2015; Wiseman et al., 2015), identify areas for action/quality improvement (Riiskær et al., 2012) and reveal any ambiguities or issues with the questionnaire (Wiseman et al., 2015). It has also been shown that patients' free-text comments can bring quantitative data to life and help engage clinicians' with patient feedback (Reeves and Seccombe, 2008; Reeves et al., 2013). However, it is also important to recognise that respondents who provide a written comment may not be representative of the population surveyed. Previous studies have shown a bias in the types of respondents who added their own free-text comment (Knowles et al., 2002; Thomas et al., 2006). The purpose of this research was to analyse parents' free-text comments provided in a large-scale postal survey about their experiences of neonatal care.

Methods

The Neonatal Survey 2014 involved 88 neonatal units across 72 NHS trusts in England. The survey was administered in two waves to capture the experiences of parents between October 2013 and

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September 2014. For each unit, a sample of up to 100 parents per wave were sent a questionnaire to complete at home. Parents aged 16 and over were eligible for the survey if their baby had received neonatal care for 24 h or longer and had been discharged home during the sampling periods. A total of 15,944 parents were sent a questionnaire and responses were received from 6000 parents, a response rate of 37.6 percent.

Of the 6000 respondents to the survey, 62 percent ($n = 3738$) provided free-text comments. Respondents could only provide one free-text comment each within the survey, all other survey questions were closed-ended. The demographic characteristics of those survey respondents who wrote a free-text comment were compared with those respondents that did not make a comment (Table 1). The chi-squared test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the expected and observed frequencies. Table 1 shows that a significantly higher proportion of white respondents provided a comment compared to non-white respondents (64.9% compared with 48.5%), and a significantly higher proportion of parents whose baby had stayed in the neonatal unit for longer than one week made a comment (64.3% compared with 35.7% of respondents whose baby stayed in the unit for less than one week). The age structure differed slightly between the respondents who provided comments and those that did not. However, there were not any significant differences in the percentage of respondents that provided a comment with regard to the length of their baby's gestation or birthweight (Table 1).

All 3738 comments were analysed using Framework analysis (Thomas et al., 2006; Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). Framework analysis is a process of generating themes via a series of stages and constant refinement, which then allows the researcher to develop a fully transparent understanding of experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). An initial framework was developed by two researchers using NVivo 11 software using key themes found within the Picker Institute's principles of person centred care, markers of family centred care identified in the literature, as well as other themes that arose from the questionnaire.

To ensure these themes accurately encompassed experiences highlighted by the parents, both researchers independently reviewed a subset of 50 comments from two trusts and based on their comparisons an additional theme was created to capture issues related to the questionnaire wording and design. This led to the development of eleven themes represented in the initial framework (Table 2). Each theme, with the exception of comments related to the questionnaire, had a positive and negative subcategory. These binary groupings allowed the researchers to distinguish

Table 2
Themes in the initial and final coding frame.

Themes – Initial framework	Themes – Final framework
Communication Information	Information & Communication
Involvement in feeding your baby Involvement in other aspects of caring for baby	Involvement – feeding your baby Involvement – skin to skin
Environment and facilities Continuity of care or transitions	Involvement – other Environment and facilities Transitions
Effective treatment Care from staff	Effective treatment Care from staff
Overall quality of care Availability of staff	Overall quality of care Availability of staff
General comments relating to other survey questions	Comments relating to the questionnaire General thank you comment

between what stood out to parents as examples of good quality care and those areas in need of improvement.

Four coders then used the initial framework to code 50 comments each and highlighted any comments that did not fit with the existing themes. The team reviewed the coding framework and two modifications were made: firstly, skin-to-skin contact was highlighted as a specific theme and was added to the framework. Secondly, the themes of information and communication were collapsed into one theme as consistent overlap in parents' comments was identified (Table 2).

Using this revised framework, the four coders then took equal share in analysing all 3738 comments. Once all comments had been coded the researchers agreed it would be beneficial to carry out a sub-analysis for those themes in which a large number of comments had been coded.

To assess the reliability of the coding between the four researchers, 5% of all comments were checked by one researcher. This showed that no comments were coded under a theme considered inappropriate although 12 comments were assigned to additional sub-themes.

Results

The most frequently coded themes

Positive and negative comments on 'care from staff' and 'information and communication' were some of the most commonly

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of those survey respondents who wrote a free-text comment and those that did not.

Demographic group		Freetext comment	No comment	Total (N)	Sig.
Ethnic group	White	64.9%	35.1%	4893	<0.001
	Non-White	48.5%	51.5%	1169	
Age (years)	16–25	57.1%	42.9%	785	0.005
	26–29	59.6%	40.4%	1176	
	30–34	63.4%	36.6%	2030	
	35 and over	62.7%	37.3%	2000	
Length of stay in neonatal unit	Up to 1 week	58.8%	41.2%	2793	<0.001
	More than 1 week	64.3%	35.7%	3271	
Length of gestation when baby born	Before 25 weeks	54.4%	45.6%	57	0.618
	25 to 29 weeks	62.6%	37.4%	436	
	30 to 32 weeks	63.0%	37.0%	682	
	33 to 37 weeks	62.0%	38.0%	2458	
	38 weeks or more	61.0%	39.0%	2387	
Weight of baby when born (grams)	Less than 1000 g	60.0%	40.0%	275	0.163
	1000 g–1500 g	58.0%	42.0%	595	
	1500 g–2500 g	62.7%	37.3%	1910	
	More than 2500 g	62.4%	37.6%	3190	

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