



Patient Property Boxes

The Older People's Improvement Collaborative (TOPIC)
Improving patient care and patient experience

January 2024

healthwatch
South Tyneside

Background

In July 2020 South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust launched a new initiative which aimed to improve the care and experience of older patients in hospital and attract more nurses to work in this important field.

The Older People's Improvement Collaborative (TOPIC) was developed due to the recognition that it is was difficult to recruit and retain nurses into the speciality of older people's nursing.

The Trust has acknowledged that staffing shortages lead to poor patient care and that it needed something more than the standard recruitment campaign.

Background

TOPIC aims for improvement in four key areas:

- the recruitment and retention of staff
- staff support, development and education (including clinical skills and QI capability)
- essential patient care
- patient experience

To understand patient experiences of care in relation to the key areas of The Older Persons Improvement Collaborative (TOPIC) the patient experience team asked Healthwatch South Tyneside to gather the views of patients, carers/family and friends and staff on wards 2 and 19 around recently introduced patient property boxes.

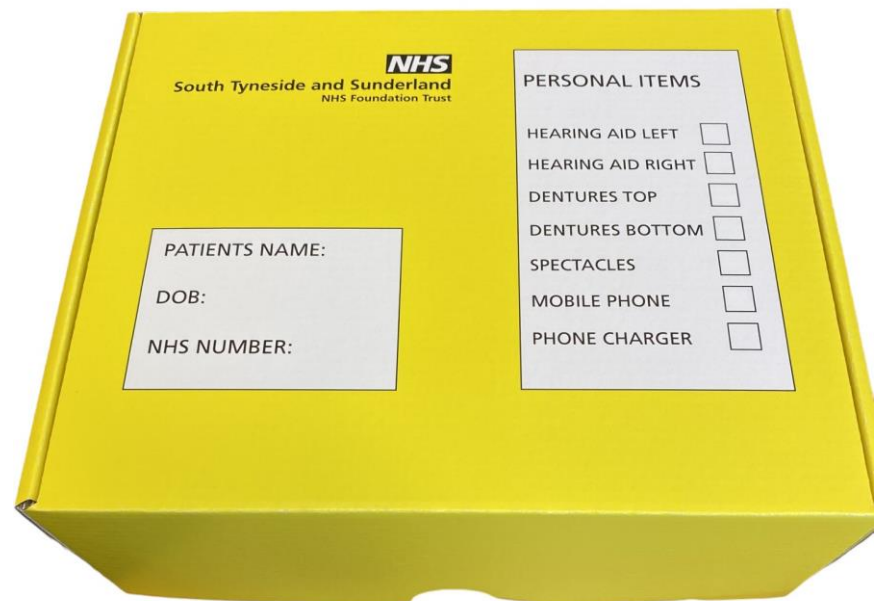


Background

The patient property boxes are single person use cardboard boxes that are provided by the ward on admission if a patient has items that support their activities of daily living.

The boxes have the capacity to contain:

- Spectacles
- Dentures
- Hearing aids
- Mobile phones
- Phone chargers



Background

The aim of the patient property box is to support patients while they are away from home by providing a centralised place to contain the items they need to carry out activities of daily living.

By having the items easily accessible to patients and stored in an identifiable way, it reduces the risk of loss when the patient is in an unfamiliar setting.

Items of this nature often go missing, which causes distress and additional costs as they need to be replaced.

By having the items with them, in a property box, it is hoped the patient will have a better experience, being able to increase their nutrition and hydration, hearing and sight in their surroundings, reducing confusion and the possibility of falls.



Methodology

A short survey was constructed, and questions were duplicated into three tailored surveys exploring identical topics from the perspectives of those associated with admissions to wards 2 and 19:

- Patients on the wards
- Carers, family and friends of patients
- Staff

Themes of focus included

- Understanding the purpose and limitations of the patient property boxes
- Usefulness of the box and how people are using boxes whilst on the ward
- Ease of use and access to boxes
- Suggestions for improvements

Open and closed questions were used to gather quantitative and qualitative data.



Methodology

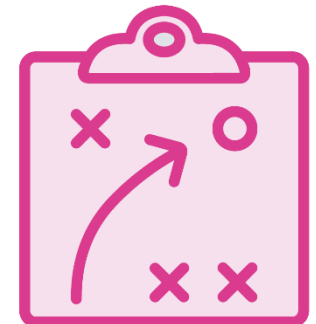
Data collection

Senior staff on wards 2 and 19 determined individuals well enough to be invited to participate. Individuals with memory problems or those lacking capacity were excluded from the survey.

Healthwatch South Tyneside staff and volunteers explained the purpose of the survey to participants and gained consent before asking any questions or documenting responses.

Participants were made aware that their responses would be recorded on paper and comments may be included in any report but fully anonymised to protect identity. Participants verbally consented to this and were given the option to withdraw/stop the survey at any time.

No personal or demographic information was collected.



Methodology

Carer/friend/family surveys were given to those visiting patients to complete. They included a front sheet explaining the survey aims and requesting that completed surveys were returned to ward staff.

Surveys were completed on the following dates and times.

Date	Ward	Time
Tuesday November 21 st 2023	Ward 2	1pm-3pm
Tuesday November 28 th 2023	Ward 2	1pm-3pm
Tuesday December 5 th 2023	Ward 2	1pm-3pm
Wednesday December 6 th 2023	Ward 19	1pm-3pm
Tuesday December 12 th 2023	Ward 19	1pm-3pm
Wednesday December 13 th 2023	Ward 19	1pm-3pm

Methodology

Sixteen out of 37 patients we spoke to did not have patient property boxes and therefore could not answer questions on their experiences of these items.

Reasons given for some patients not having patient property boxes included:

- Ward awaiting delivery of new boxes
- Patients had nothing with them to place in the box
- Patients who were considered unable to use the box independently were not given them, perhaps due to their current health or disability.

	Ward 2	Ward 19	Total
Number of patients spoken to	21	16	37
Number with boxes surveyed	10	11	21
Number without boxes	11	5	16

Methodology

All of the family/friend/carers we received responses from indicated they were carers, so the term carer is used from this point in the report.

Although provided as an option for staff, we received no electronic responses via SurveyMonkey.

	Ward 2	Ward 19	Total
Carer	1	4	5
Staff	2	9	11

Q&A: patients

Patients were asked 12 questions about the understanding about – and use of – the property boxes.

Q1 – Have you been given a yellow property box?

	Ward 2	Ward 19	Total
Number of patients spoken to	21	16	37
Number with boxes surveyed	10	11	21
Number without boxes	11	5	16

Q&A: patients

Q2 – When were you given the yellow property box?

Just over half (11 out of 21) responded that they were given the box – or it was by their bed – on arrival at the ward.

A third (seven out of 21) could not be sure when they received it. Comments included:

“Can’t remember - must have been the same day as I arrived.”

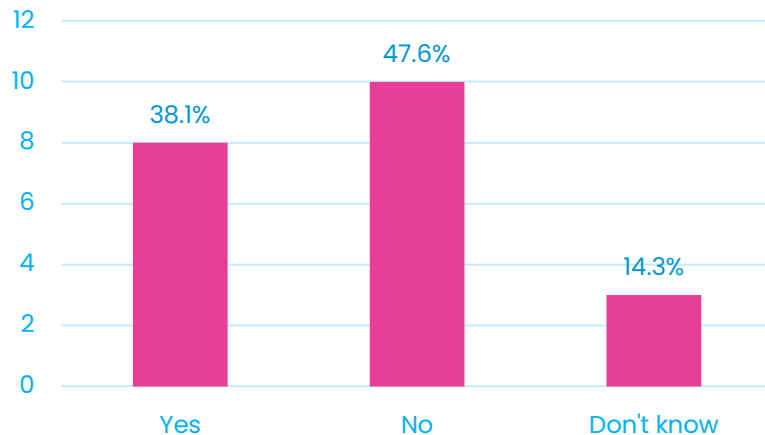
Almost half of the patients with boxes on Ward 19 (five out of 11) said they didn’t know it was there.

Others were not aware they had a box because it was out of reach/sight:

“Didn't know it was there to be honest. I can't see (partially sighted) so couldn't tell you how long it's been there.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q3 – Did someone explain what the box was for?



Only 38% said they were told the purpose of the box. Some patients could not recall the property box being given to them or the purpose of it being explained.

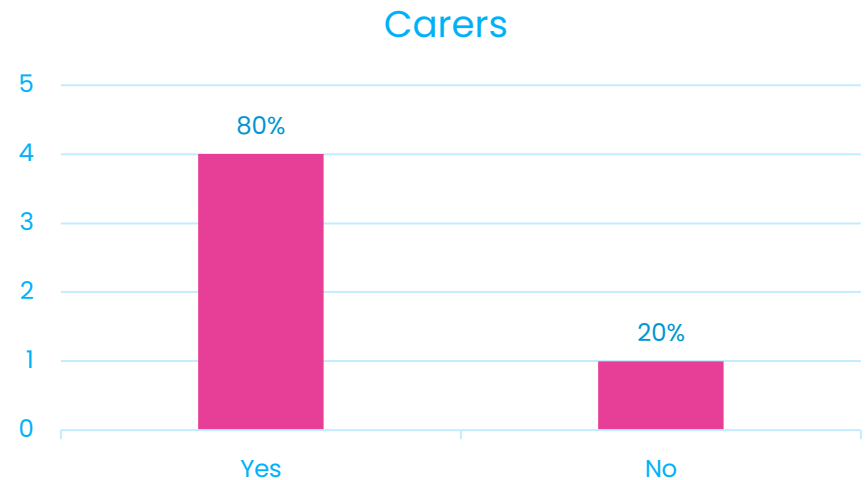
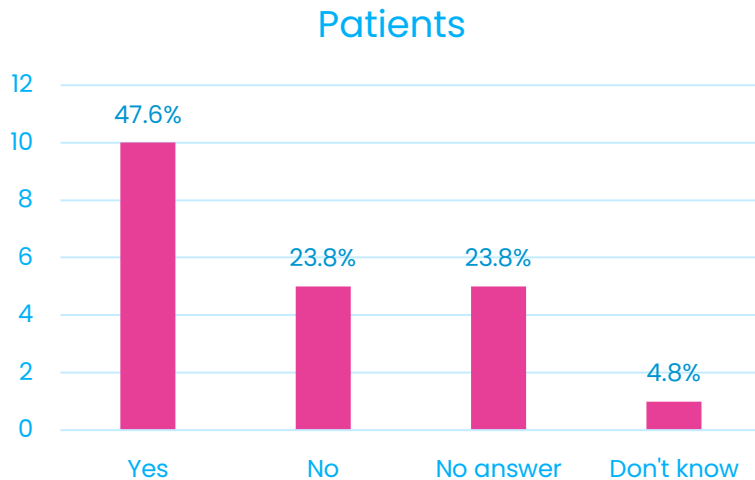
One said: *“I haven't had it that long. I was looking at it the other day and was wondering what it was for.”*

Two carers told us the box was given to the person they care for on admission and all five surveyed reported that the purpose of the box was explained to them.

But when carers were also asked if they felt the person they cared for understood the purpose of the box, a mixed response was noted – two said ‘yes’, two said ‘no’ and one replied ‘don’t know’.

Q&A: patients and carers

Q4 – Patients and carers were asked if they had been advised the box is not for valuables and that they should be kept safe at home.



Q&A: patients

Q5 – Patients were asked what they used their box for and what they kept inside it.

This question generated a range of answers. Some had only the items listed on the front of the box inside, while others had additional items such as toiletries or snacks and some chose not to use the box at all. Comments included:

“Very handy. Use it for phone charger and phone, hearing aid, things and pens.”

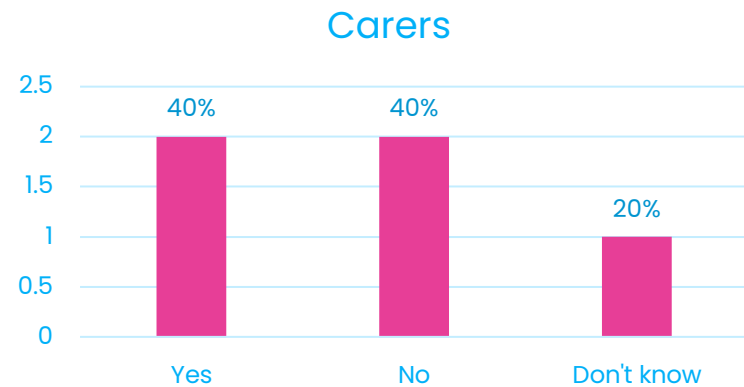
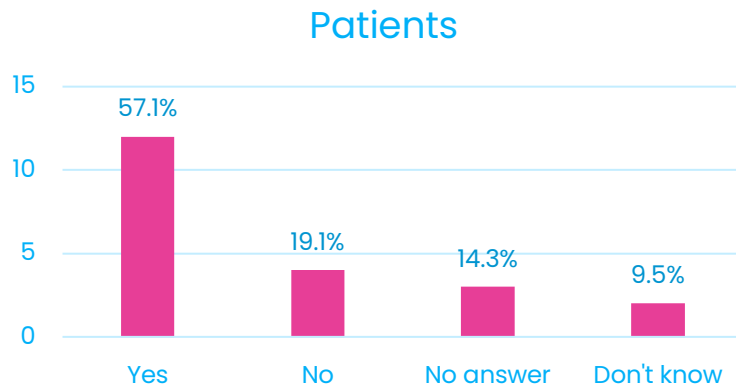
“Just some grub....snacks.”

“Glasses, pens, toothbrush, caring for myself things. The things my husband didn't pack for me!”

“Soap toothbrush, razor - small stuff that might go wandering.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q6 – Patients and carers were asked if they felt confident that their property/the property of the person they care for was safe in the box.



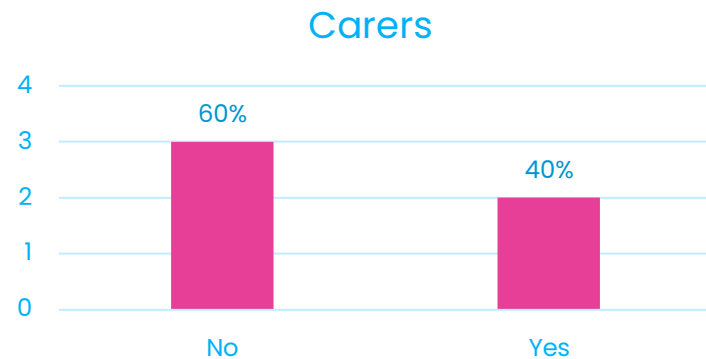
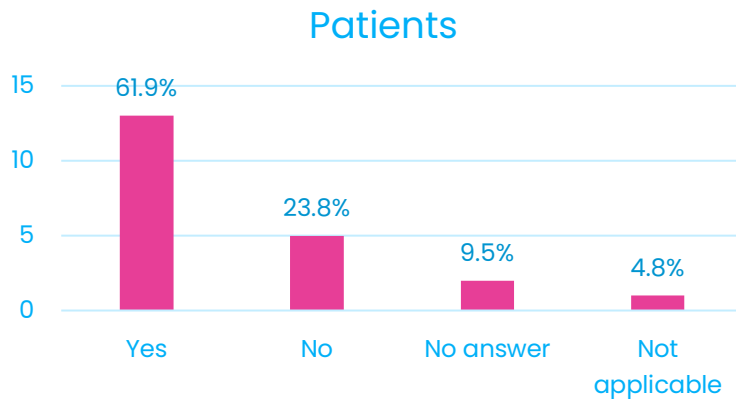
Just over half of the 21 patients surveyed felt their items would be safe but safety was a concern for others. Comments included:

“Nothing in box - I’m not using as it has no lock on it.”

“If I was a thief I would thank the hospital as I could just pick up the box and walk out.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q7 – Patients and carers were asked if they found the box easy to reach.



Patient comments included:

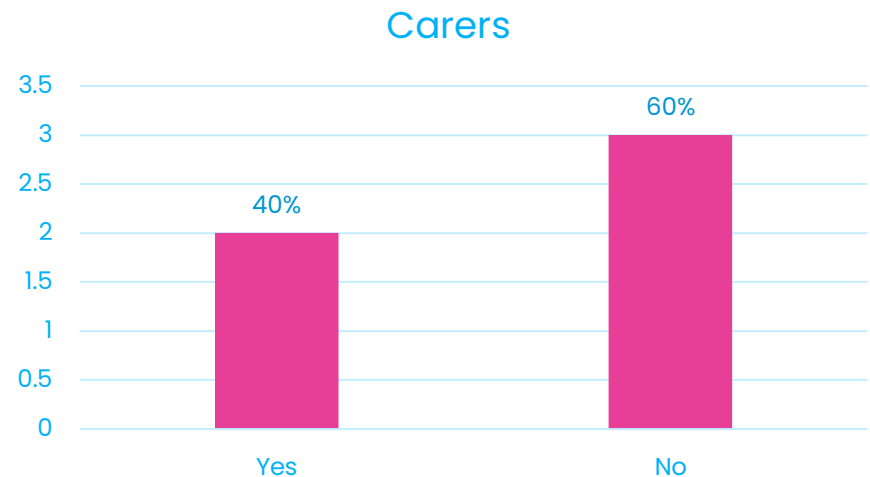
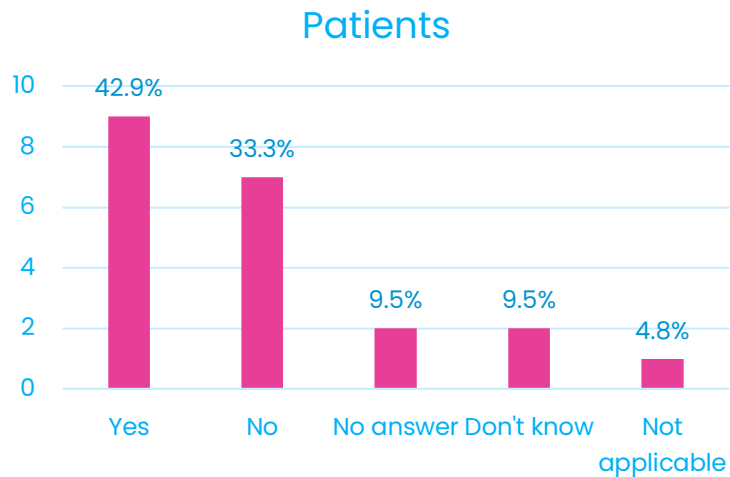
“I can’t walk so wouldn't get it.”

(The box was placed on top a small cabinet close to the wall away from the bed).

“I’ve got bits of this and that in mine...just stuff! I'd always keep it on my table so I could find it.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q8 – Patients and carers were asked if they found the box easy to use (e.g. open, close, pick up and put down).



Q&A: patients and carers

Q8 – Patients and carers were asked if they found the box easy to use (e.g. open, close, pick up and put down). Most patients picked up the boxes to consider their answers, demonstrating ease or difficulty of use.

Comments included:

“Opened and closed easily.” “Easy to lift up and down.”

“Not easy to open; I only have one hand.” “The flaps get in the way.”

“It’s easy when you know how.”

“Struggle to close it - its hard and a fiddle on.”

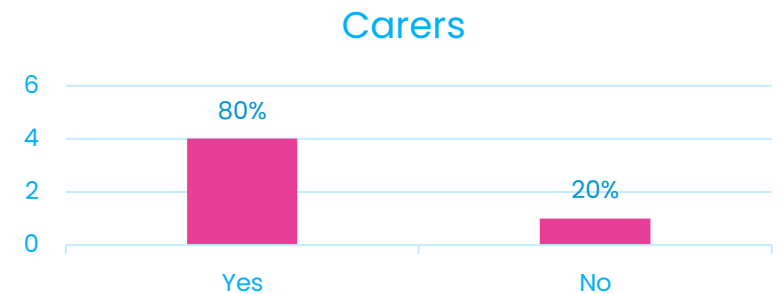
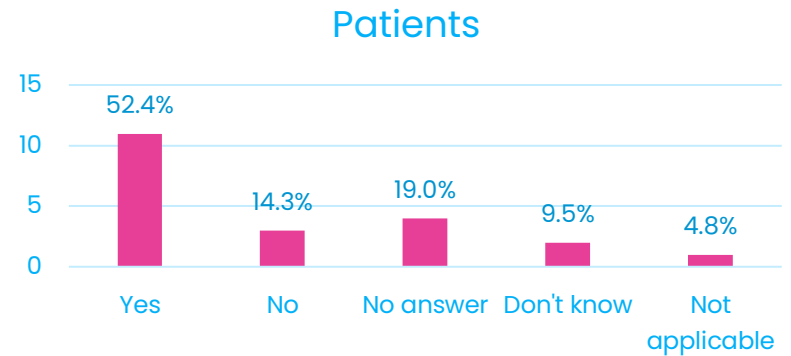
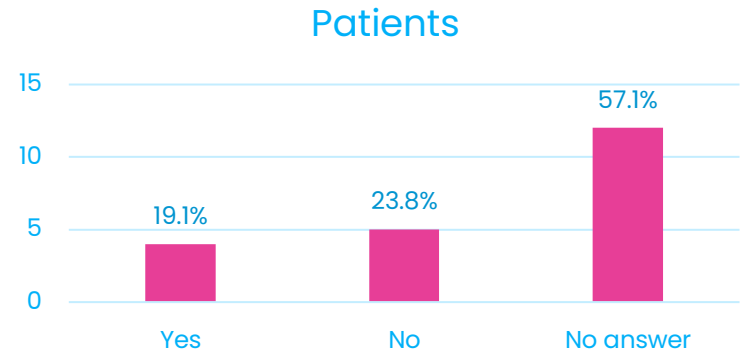
“Need to make sure it’s the right way up so everything doesn’t fall out when opening the lid. I only have use of one eye so its hard to put back together - it took a bit of time to learn.”

Q&A: patients

Q9 – Patients were asked if staff reminded or encouraged them to put things in the box.

Q10 – Patients were asked if they found the box useful and what the benefits of the box were.

Carers were asked to rate usefulness with yes = very useful and no = not useful at all.



Q&A: patients and carers

Q10 – Patients were asked if they found the box useful and what the benefits of the box were. Comments tended to focus on being organised and reducing clutter at bedsides:

“Just everything I need will be in one place. Will be helpful”.

“Keeps the table clear for meals”.

“Very happy with it. At night time I put it in the wardrobe.”

“At least I know where I’ve put things - good to be able to see them.”

“If I had my teeth here I'd put them in there. It's easy for a nurse to knock them off the table otherwise. They cost a fortune.”

“Good idea to have the box. You know where to look for your things. I am always losing things.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q10 – Patients were asked if they found the box useful and what the benefits of the box were. Some referred to the boxes preventing items being taken by other patients:

“To be useful you need to be able to put it away. It's a good thing as patients pass and pick things up.”

“Don't have to worry about your stuff especially if there is a patient wandering about and picking up stuff. If things are not in sight people will not look for them or take stuff.”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q11 – Patients and carers were asked if/how the box could be improved.

Patient comments included:

“(Make it) easier to close...needs a sticker for the top so it can be re-used by next person. Make it out of metal?”

“Different design, different lid, sticker for name change.”

“(Make it) less complicated open and closing. If you’ve never used it before can be hard. I can remember trying to close it and thinking: ‘Who has designed this? It’s like a puzzle’.”

“Easier lid open/close system which would encourage people to use it, especially if less able than I am.”

One carer also suggested making opening and closing the box easier.

Q&A: patients and carers

Q11 – Patients and carers were asked if/how the box could be improved.

Some people liked the bright colour.

“Adequate for what I need, colour stands out”

But safety was a concern for others:

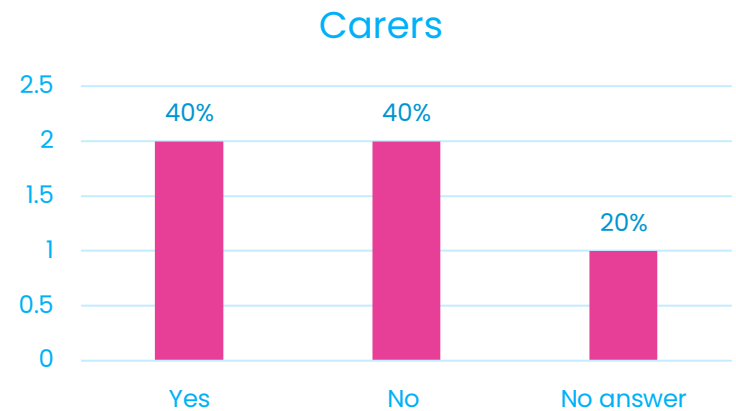
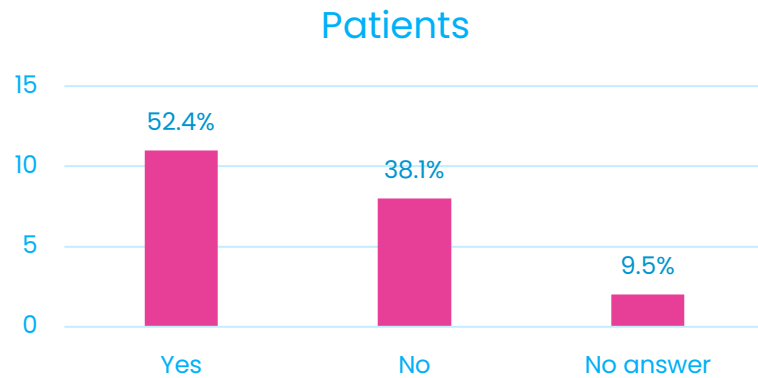
“A lock - I don't think you can put a lock on cardboard”.

“If I was a thief I would thank the hospital as I could just pick up the box and walk out.”

“Having a wall safe which couldn't be removed would be better .”

Q&A: patients and carers

Q12 – Patients and carers were asked if they would find the box useful when they go home/leave the ward.



Comments by patients included:

“I will take it home to put things in, lists for my husband.”

“Probably leave it here but may take it home.”

Q&A: staff

Eleven members of staff responded via paper surveys to 15 questions. No electronic survey responses were received, despite posters being distributed for display in staff areas on wards.

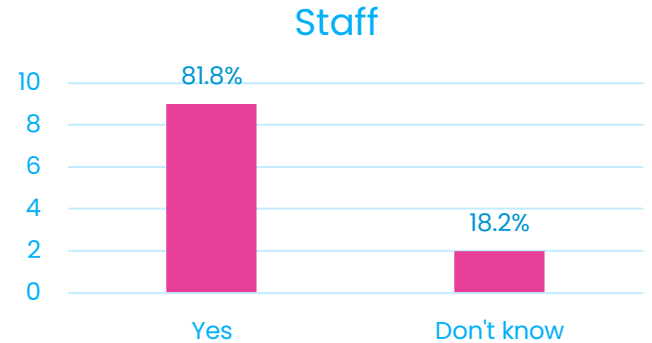
All 11 staff reported they were aware of the patient property boxes and that they had experience of giving them to patients on admission.

All told us they understood the purpose of the patient property boxes but two members of staff reported uncertainty around patients always understanding them.

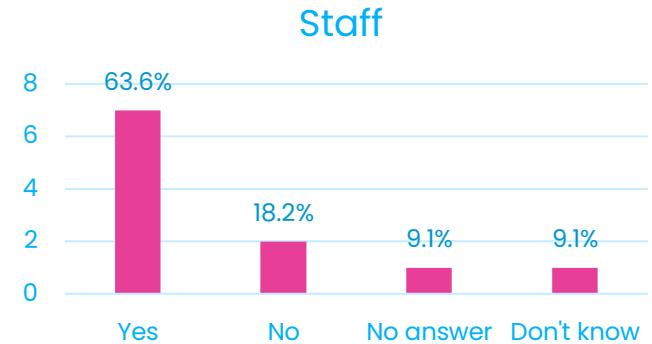
Nine of the staff respondents said that the purpose of the box was always explained to patients and their family/carers.

Q&A: staff

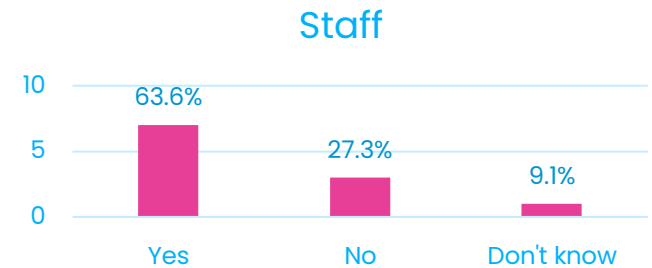
Is the purpose of the box always explained to patients, family and friends?



Are patients using boxes independently?



Are patients using boxes correctly, i.e. putting the right items in them?



Q&A: staff

When asked what patients were using the boxes for, staff responded:

“Keeping property and valuables together and safe.”

“Most use for belongings but some put rubbish in them.”

“For snacks as well as personal items.”

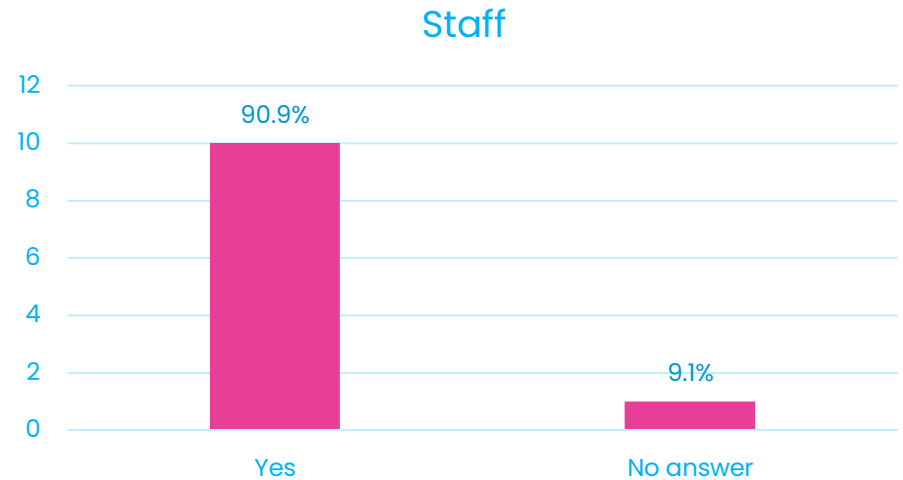
Staff reported property boxes mostly included the intended items, e.g. spectacles, hearing aids, mobile phones and chargers, dentures.

One member of staff said:

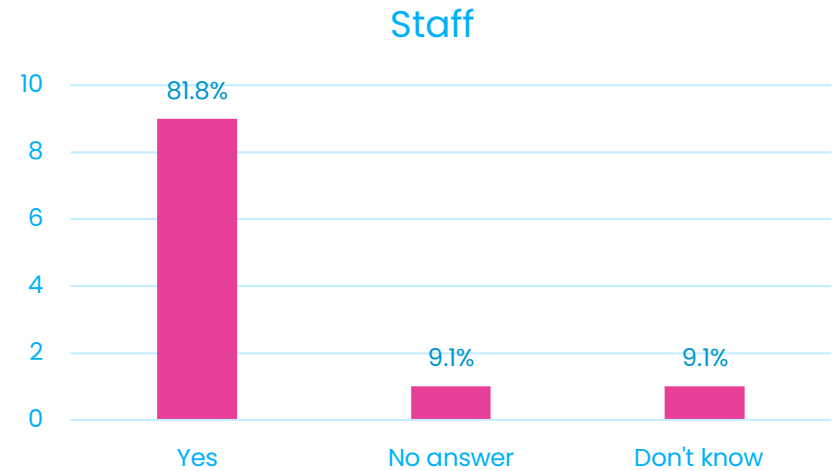
“Usually nursing staff ensure valuables are in boxes, especially at night, then patients have valuables back in the morning.”

Q&A: staff

Are boxes within easy reach of patients?

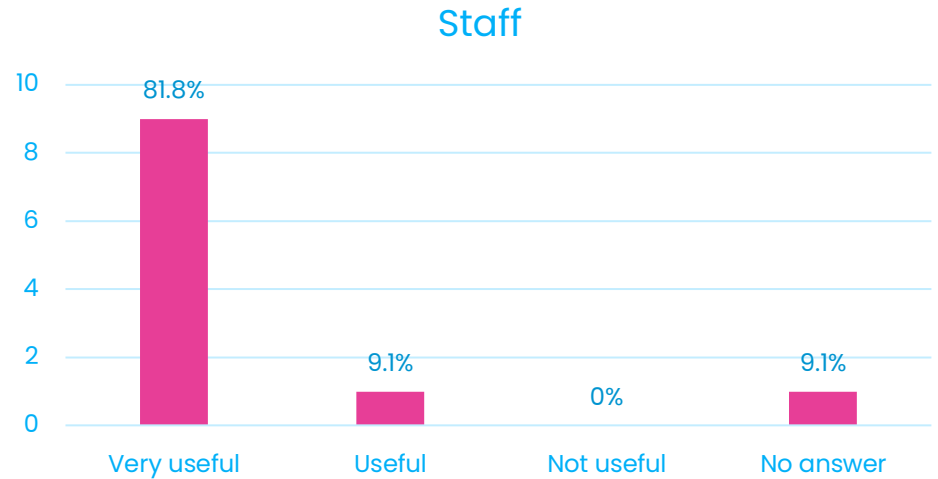


Do you think patients and carers find them easy to use?

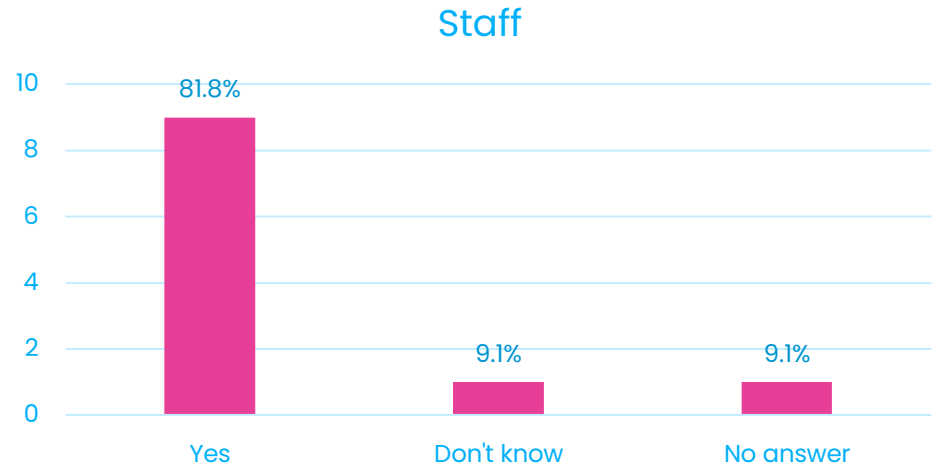


Q&A: staff

Staff were asked to grade how useful they felt the boxes were from, very useful to not useful at all.



When asked if they had noticed a decrease of lost items on the ward since the introduction of the boxes, staff answered:



Q&A: staff

Explaining the benefits of patient property boxes, staff comments included:

“Easy to identify what patients had on arrival if things are taken then reported as missing - easy to check on discharge that they have everything they came in with.”

“Easy to locate valuables; decreases risk of misplacing.”

“So we both can find things like dentures, hearing aids dentures and all things are in one place avoiding things going missing.”

“Table stays tidy, staff know where to keep and look for patients’ things instead of putting hearing aids in sputum pots or denture pots.”

“We have seen a significant reduction in the amount of items lost. Easy for staff to check personal belongings if something suspected missing.”

Q&A: staff

When asked to suggest improvements, staff said:

“To save cost, the front of the box could have a patient information card which slips into a pocket - reducing the cost to supply/multi use.”

“The boxes are too big for tables with a food tray to fit. There are no bedside lockers so room is limited.”

“Could be recyclable.”

“Maybe a place to add date and time and what was in box on discharge as a double check.”

Key observations

These are the key observations we made during our visits to the two wards:

- Boxes are being given to and used by many patients on both wards.
- Staff assess patients on their suitability to receive and use a patient property box.
- Many patients seem to understand the boxes, their use and report the benefits of having a central place for essential items.
- Some patients could not recall the boxes being given or explained, perhaps due to poor health and lots of information being given on admission.
- Although most patients indicated they were aware they should leave valuables at home, some mentioned - and we observed instances - where jewellery, wallets and watches were stored inside boxes.

Key observations

- Boxes reduce “clutter” on tables.
- We observed some patients’ boxes placed far away from them (sometimes on the other side of the room or out of reach/sight of the person).
- We observed and heard how many people struggled to open/close the boxes (often due to the tabs which need to slide into the box to securely close the lid).
- Boxes are bright and easily recognisable around the ward/bed space.
- Ease of use and recycling/reusing were common responses.
- Concerns were raised by some around possible theft/loss of the box with everything in it.

Key observations

- Staff have voiced that the boxes make logging the items a person has on admission easier. Tick boxes to the lid of the box enable staff to mark which items are contained, meaning communication of items accompanying/required by the person and what may be missing is clearer. It also, to a degree, enables patient items to be checked on discharge.
- Staff reported boxes to be useful and there had been a reduction in lost items.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the feedback from patients, carers and staff and our own observations:

- Box design requires attention due to difficulty of opening and closing for many patients; ideally a design which enabled use with one hand, preferably without folding tabs.
- Consider revisiting any explanation and demonstration of property boxes with patients a few days after admission, when they may be well enough to absorb information and utilise the box.
- Take care to ensure boxes are placed within physical and visual reach of patients.
- Take care to ensure boxes travel with the person – one person told us they lost the box with their glasses inside when they moved from a side room.

Recommendations

- Take care around labelling of the box if taken home as it includes personal details such as name, DOB and NHS number.
- Clear instruction re leaving valuables at home might reduce the likelihood of patients using boxes for watches and jewellery.
- Consider a blanket approach in giving boxes to all patients with essential items to keep track of. Those who may not manage independently may still benefit from a property box. Carers may also benefit from having access to this resource.
- Consider adding a discharge check box to list which items left the ward with the patient.

Final comments

We would like to thank all Trust staff, patients and carers who took part in – and facilitated – this research.

Hopefully it will achieve its objective of assisting the Trust in its TOPIC programme, in particular the two key aims around patient care and patient experience.

For more information

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