In this article...
► Why the Kissing It Better initiative was developed
► Benefits of using volunteers from the community
► Feedback from patients and carers

5 key points
1 Good ideas are not shared enough between wards, let alone between healthcare providers.
2 Providers miss out on skills and resources if they fail to tap into local communities.
3 Strong leadership, good coordination and ongoing management are important in implementing and sustaining voluntary activity.
4 Volunteering in a health setting benefits staff and volunteers, as well as patients and carers.
5 Inviting volunteers to spend time with patients and carers can raise morale and help patients feel connected with the outside.

Harnessing volunteer skills in health settings

Using volunteers from the community can address patients’ non-medical needs, and bring benefits to patients, carers, healthcare staff and the volunteers themselves.

**Innovation**

**Volunteers**

Good ideas in healthcare are rarely passed from one ward to another within the same hospital, let alone from one hospital or health centre to the wider world. Having experienced this as both health professionals and consumers, Jill Fraser and Nicola Matthews launched Kissing It Better, a project designed to harness the time, skills and commitment of the wider community.

The project was born from their determination to find a way of promoting some of the good work already taking place in the NHS and to share examples of best practice across the country and beyond. They launched the Kissing it Better website to provide an easy-to-use forum where health workers, patients and their carers could share good, often simple, ideas that make a “world of difference” to patients’ experiences of hospitals and healthcare.

After hearing about the project through a personal contact, Sue Hartley, director of nursing, and Kathryn Halford, associate director of nursing at Walsall Healthcare Trust, were keen to get involved and arranged to meet Jill Fraser. During the meeting, Ms Fraser said she believed that the NHS could and should be doing much more to harness the energy and enthusiasm of the most dynamic groups in local communities to make a difference to the experience of patients and carers in hospitals and other health settings.

In 2011, Walsall Healthcare became the first NHS trust to pilot the Kissing It Better approach to embracing the support of the local community in a sustained and coordinated way in an acute hospital.

The initiative was not about improving clinical care but about improving practical concerns, such as communication, comfort and surroundings for patients and their families and carers. It aimed to establish a long-term and sustainable programme of activities that embrace the third sector and offer clear benefits to everyone involved.

The aims of Kissing it Better at Walsall Healthcare Trust were to:

» Improve the hospital experience for patients, visitors and staff;
» Introduce regular, organised, morale-boosting events on wards;
» Facilitate better communication between staff, patients and visitors;
» Ensure a mutually beneficial experience for those giving and receiving care.

Harnessing the wider community

The Kissing it Better pilot involved a range of activities, initially on a stroke ward and an acute medical ward, including:

» Hand and arm massages, manicures and facial treatments by student beauty therapists from nearby Walsall College;
» Performances by adult and children’s choirs and local schoolchildren;

Student beauty therapists gave arm massages.
Readings from nursery rhymes to Shakespeare by members of First Act Workshop, a Midlands drama group; Visits by trained dogs and handlers through the Pets as Therapy charity; Music therapy sessions and establishing a hospital choir, led by music director Jackie Rixborough; Tea for two – a chat over a cup of tea involving volunteers, staff and patients; Bingo sessions organised by a housekeeper.

These activities take place as part of a regular, well-organised programme, coordinated by the volunteer manager, Jan Martin, and supervised by a committed team of senior hospital volunteers. The student beauty therapists, for example, attend in blocks to fit in with their studies, under the supervision of a senior tutor who values the work experience for her students as well as appreciating the benefits to the patients and those around them.

The drama groups concentrate on reading poems and extracts that are likely to be familiar to patients. This has huge benefits for patients with dementia or brain injuries, because they are often delighted to be able to recall verses they learnt many years ago and join in. The hospital’s own volunteers bought a tea set and trolley to encourage patients and carers to chat with them, and with staff, in a relaxed and informal way.

**Positive feedback**

During the initial 12-month pilot of Kissing it Better, the feedback from staff, patients and carers was overwhelmingly positive (Box 1). An added spin-off was the benefit that many of the groups and organisations also gained from the experience. The feedback from relatives and carers, whose loved ones have shown a positive response for the first time in many days or weeks, has been very moving.

Staff fed back that they appreciated the time and commitment of the volunteers, both those from the outside with specific skills and the dedicated team of in-house volunteers who gave their time to supervise them.

Many of the ideas introduced as part of Kissing it Better could not have happened if we had not looked outside, due to the time pressures on clinical staff. Nurses recognise that they simply are not able to offer the same level of high-quality time and input on very busy wards. Our matrons acknowledge that they simply are not able to recognise that they simply are not able to.

**BOX 1. FEEDBACK**

- A woman who had not spoken since having a stroke was so moved when a student beauty therapist gave her a manicure and hand massage that she said: “I feel good now”
- A man who thought he had virtually no memory was thrilled to be able to join in the reading of a poem he had learnt by rote as a child
- A patient said a simple manicure had made her feel “like a woman” again
- “When a student beauty therapist gave my wife a manicure, she spoke for the first time since her stroke. It made me cry.” Relative
- “Mum died on the 11.11.11. I remember how she enjoyed the poem you read her by Kipling, if I miss her terribly but I will always remember that day.” Relative
- “I came into hospital for an operation and I’m going out feeling like a model.” Patient, after a beauty treatment
- “I was so nervous when I arrived but I’ve come out of my shell. I have loved seeing the patients look so happy.” Student beauty therapist

**BOX 2. VOLUNTEERS**

- Student beauty therapists from a local college offer simple massages and manicures. Trainee hairdressers are keen to join the programme
- Schoolchildren come into the hospital to sing and talk to patients and carers
- Drama groups perform everything from nursery rhymes to passages from Shakespeare
- Musicians perform on the wards and in other areas of the hospital
- Animals are brought in by volunteers from the Pets as Therapy charity
- Brownies are keen to use their experience of volunteering to complete their Dignity badge
- Hospital volunteers make the time to chat to patients over a cup of tea
- Support staff are keen to offer their time, for example by organising bingo sessions
- Charities are interested in pooling resources to take the initiative forward
- In-house experienced volunteers supervise all the activities

The various activities have shown benefits for pressure area care. For example, patients need to lean forward (shifting pressure) and stretch their fingers to have a manicure or stroke a dog. They breathe better when they sing and are encouraged to move if the song involves some actions.

**Next steps**

The 12-month pilot was managed at Walsall Healthcare on a part-time basis by Ms Fraser. We were so pleased with its success that we plan to develop and expand it on a long-term basis and have begun transferring the day-to-day running of the initiative to our existing volunteer manager.

Kissing it Better has been successfully introduced in other areas of the hospital, including day surgery, paediatrics and outpatients. We plan to extend it to our surgical wards.

Meanwhile, Ms Fraser and her team have been taking the “model” created at Walsall to other hospitals around the country, including trusts in Warwick, Dudley, Birmingham, London, Stevenage and Manchester. Kissing it Better is also working in several nursing and residential homes.

**Conclusion**

Kissing it Better is a highly adaptable initiative that can be tailored to suit different organisations, depending on their size and needs and the resources available within the local community.

The project can be introduced on a small scale or developed widely throughout the organisation. The only limitations are the time and commitment of those involved. Kissing it Better has had such a positive impact at Healthcare Trust that we have had no hesitation in developing and expanding it into other areas across the organisation. NT

- Kissing it Better and Walsall Healthcare Trust won the Nursing Times Award 2012 in the Care of Older People category.
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