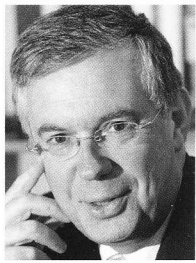


# HASLAM'S VIEW



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## Do we just pay lip service to patient-centred care?

**IF ONLY I WERE BETTER ORGANISED, I WOULD HAVE KEPT A RUNNING**

list of all the NHS speak that has permeated my working career. I'm so old that I recall executive councils as being the local organisations that dealt with GPs in England. They were followed by FHSAs, then PCGs, then PCTs, and now we have CCGs and the Commissioning Board and all the rest.

It isn't just the organisations that come and go. For quite a while we had the phrase 'primary care led NHS', but the phrase existed for years before anyone had the slightest idea what it was intended to mean.

And the other phrase that is always being touted as appropriate to everything and anything is 'patient centred'. And why not? If we aren't here to serve patients, then we shouldn't be here at all. I'm absolutely certain that patient centredness should be at the very core of our being. The worry is that it is sometimes a soundbite served up as a policy.

A colleague told me a wonderful story that summed this up very clearly. He had to attend a major London teaching hospital for a barium enema X-ray. He arrived on time and was told there would be a 45-minute wait. No surprise there, though it would have been nice if someone had told him why there was a wait.

Eventually he was shown through to the X-ray department. He was taken into a cubicle, asked to strip

off and put on one of those gowns that leaves you chilly and exposed down the back, and then was left there for another 40 minutes. He had no information, no reading material, no explanations. Again, I doubt if that story will have surprised you in the least.

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The thing that really amused him is that as he was sitting there he was able to listen in to a teaching session between the superintendent radiographer and the new recruits. He said she was very good and clearly believed in her subject: 'The importance of patient centredness'.

He felt rather too vulnerable to put his head round the curtain and share his personal experience of patient centredness, but if anything highlighted the tendency to talk the talk without walking the walk, it was this.

I wish it was unusual. I recently accompanied a friend to a hospital appointment. It was for 9 am.

At 9 o'clock the waiting room was full, but no clinicians were anywhere to be seen. At 10 o'clock several consultants arrived. They didn't look as if they were in a hurry, and they certainly weren't apologetic. No-one was apologetic. No-one said anything to the poor souls in the waiting room.

I asked my friend, who has often had to go to this unit, whether this was unusual. 'Oh no,' she said, 'It's always like this.'

'So why doesn't anyone complain?' I asked.

'No-one complains,' she said. 'We know they must be busy. It's not the doctors' fault. They do their best.'

I am sure they do do their best. After all, there was a big notice in the waiting room stressing that this was a patient centred organisation. So that was all right. Personally, despite the fact that this unit was a world renowned teaching hospital, I consider the way they ran this clinic as shoddy, rude, and intolerable. In any other aspect of our lives no-one would tolerate being treated like this. And no amount of patient-centred mission statements makes it any different.

All of us will be patients one day. Then we will understand just what it means.

### Tell us what you think?

If you want to share your experiences or views with other readers, write to: [editor@thepractitioner.co.uk](mailto:editor@thepractitioner.co.uk)