

# Poetic representation of a patient's priorities for pre-operative patient education

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An action research study was undertaken in one NHS Trust with the aim of improving preoperative education for patients awaiting colorectal surgery. Written/audiovisual educational materials, observations of educational interactions, evaluation questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with 138 participants (97 patients, 19 carers and 22 staff) were analysed. Poetry has been used to convey patients' experiences of preoperative education in an evocative and challenging way.

## That's my body

*The DVD and information pack were useful; I knew what to expect that day  
And I'd Googled so I knew what to ask and to say  
I was told when to come in and that my surgery would be the same day  
We need to make plans for our son; he's disabled – but we'll sort it  
Our daughter lives close by and our other son's coming home Friday*

*I had watched the scan on the screen; was I asking too many questions?  
I thought of it as pipe work; I'm an engineer so perhaps an extension?  
I had imagined a gap there; what's going to fill that up?  
It was the first time I realised that they take a section out  
That they have to loosen the bowel and move it all about*

*The biopsy results could be improved on; it was a five or six day wait  
I mean I realise that they can't possibly tell you straight away  
But you would have thought someone could phone you in a couple of days  
Otherwise I was impressed with everything to be honest  
The specialist nurses are very good; they answered my questions straight away*

*What did I ask? Oh simple things like "How long would I be in hospital?"  
"How could I help with the recovery stage?" and "How could I shorten it?"  
So one of the things she said was to exercise; no smoking and to get fit  
So I took her advice and stayed positive; I've always been reasonably fit  
I think the biggest thing was my determination to get over it*

*The 'Going Home' leaflet was handy to refer to now and again  
For instance, the diet and that sort of thing  
"Can I have this?" and "When can I start having fibre again?"  
I did use the web but looking back, I'd say "Don't Google"  
It can be frightening and that's not a good thing*

*Rethinking about it, the one thing that might still be lacking  
Is information about your body and how it would be  
Not a very nice subject; but bowel movements and that sort of thing  
I thought there was something wrong because one of the things that surprised me  
Was the horrendous smell; it would have been helpful to warn me*

*Sorry, I'm jumping about but I still wonder how much they chopped out  
I want to know what went on; that's my body they pulled about  
"How do they join it up?" "Is it stretched and how do they do it?"  
These are the questions I'll ask; write them down for my next appointment  
Something must take its place; something must fill that space*

*Oh and the epidural - when I came round I was completely numb  
You think the worst don't you? What have they done?  
I couldn't move my toes or my feet or feel anything from the waist down  
I asked a nurse straight away and she told me that everything was OK  
But I think they should tell you; in the booklet and before you go in, I would say*

*Another thing I was surprised at was how long it would take for stitches  
To gradually work themselves out; they are not dissolving stitches  
I can feel them pricking now; working their way to the surface  
They pop out which isn't painful; no more than a pin prick really  
But I wasn't prepared for that and it might have been helpful to tell me*

*I wasn't prepared for how tired I would be  
I have found the simplest things really tire me  
That first walk to the shop really shattered me  
I want to work and I'm bored when I can't do things  
I'm very impatient but try not to rush things*

*I'm lucky and recovered quickly; only in there for two and a half days  
I'm generally quite fit and I took their advice  
The previous record was actually four days  
I was positive; thinking "I'll get over things and everything will be fine"  
Everyone is different but for me it was all about time*

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Poetry can offer a uniquely graphic and accessible way to represent action research findings and patients' lived experiences. Condensing patient narratives, using their words and phrases from longitudinal interview transcripts, helped to highlight their priorities for information and education. Poems thus provide a way of communicating core narratives and evoking the emotional dimensions of experience with an economy of words, thereby increasing the chance of understanding someone else's world (Rapport & Sparkes 2009).