Patient-centred care is ‘an approach to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of health care that is grounded in mutually beneficial partnerships among healthcare providers, patients, and families’.9

1.1 CONCEPTS OF PATIENT-CENTRED CARE

Numerous proposed definitions of patient-centred care encompass similar core concepts, but there is no globally accepted definition.9 Modern concepts of patient-centred care are based largely on research conducted in 1993 by the Picker Institute in conjunction with the Harvard School of Medicine. The research identified eight dimensions of patient-centred care that were originally documented in Through the Patient’s Eyes: Understanding and Promoting Patient-Centered Care.11 The dimensions are:

- respect for patients’ preferences and values
- emotional support
- physical comfort
- information, communication and education
- continuity and transition
- coordination of care
- the involvement of family and friends
- access to care.

The framework clearly defined the patient’s perspective for the first time and served as the foundation for the Picker surveys measuring patient experiences of health care.12

The concept of patient-centred care clearly recognises the need to include not only the patient in their care, but significant others, including family, friends, carers, spiritual and pastoral advisers, and broader community members.

Patient-centred care also focuses on staff. To succeed, a patient-centred approach should also address the staff experience, because the staff’s ability and inclination to care effectively for patients is compromised if they do not feel cared for themselves.13

Organisation-specific concepts of patient-centred care have also emerged. Some organisations identify individual elements of patient-centred care as part of an overall patient-centred care framework. An overview of leading organisations promoting strategies for patient-centred care is presented in Section 2.5.

The World Health Organization (WHO) uses the term ‘responsiveness’ in preference to ‘patient-centred care’. Responsiveness describes how a healthcare system meets people’s expectations regarding respect for people and their wishes, communication between health workers and patients, and waiting times.14 WHO states that recognising responsiveness as an intrinsic goal of health systems reinforces the fact that health systems are there to serve people.

Several studies reviewing patient-centred care in the US9 (cited in Goodrich and Cornwell15) have identified the core elements as:

- education and shared knowledge
- involvement of family and friends
- collaboration and team management
- sensitivity to nonmedical and spiritual dimensions of care
- respect for patient needs and preferences
- the free flow and accessibility of information.
SYSTEM-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:
Policy makers and regulators should include patient-centred care as a dimension of quality in its own right in strategic and other policy documentation.

Recommendation 2:
A core set of nationally endorsed patient survey questions should be developed to facilitate collation and comparison of patient care experience data in key healthcare settings.

Recommendation 3:
Patient surveys used to assess patient care experience need to include questions specifically addressing recognised patient-centred care domains and assess more than patient 'satisfaction'.

Recommendation 4:
'Improving patient care experience' should be included as an indicator of quality and reflected in healthcare reporting and funding models.

Recommendation 5:
To improve transparency, Australian policy makers and regulators should make data regarding patient care experience in health services publicly available via websites.

Recommendation 6:
Patient-centred care should be a component of undergraduate and postgraduate education programs for all health professionals.

Recommendation 7:
Education programs should engage patients and families as teachers and collaborators, rather than solely as cases to be studied.

Recommendation 8:
Research funding bodies should acknowledge the importance of patient-centred care to the health system, and this should be reflected in the distribution of funding.
SERVICE-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Health service executives and managers should:

Recommendation 9:
Ensure that organisational systems and processes are designed to be patient-centred.

Recommendation 10:
Ensure their healthcare organisation develops a shared patient-centred mission that senior leaders continually articulate to staff to promote the implementation of patient-centred care.

Recommendation 11:
Develop and implement policies and procedures for engaging patients, families and carers in their own care.

Recommendation 12:
Develop and implement policies and procedures for involving patients, families, carers and consumers at a service level, and in policy and program development, quality improvement, patient safety initiatives and healthcare design.

Recommendation 13:
Provide support for patients, families and carers involved in governance to develop the necessary skills and capacity required for effective partnerships with their healthcare organisation.

Recommendation 14:
Ensure that the service meets the National Safety and Quality Health Service ‘Partnering with Consumers’ Standard.

Recommendation 15:
Ensure that systems are in place for the regular collection and reporting of patient care experience data through quantitative patient surveys and qualitative, narrative-based sources.

Recommendation 16:
Ensure that organisational approaches to quality improvement include feedback about patient care experience — alongside clinical and operational data — when determining health service action plans.

Recommendation 17:
Contribute to the evidence base for patient-centred care by recording and publishing changes in key organisational and patient outcome metrics over time.

Recommendation 18:
Provide organisational support to enable staff to partner with patients and consumers, and to implement any necessary changes based on that partnership.

Recommendation 19:
Support staff through training and education activities tailored to building the capacity of all staff to deliver patient-centred care.

Recommendation 20:
Focus on work environment, work culture and satisfaction of staff as an integral strategy for improving patient-centred care. Workforce surveys and review of staff recruitment and retention rates should be undertaken at regular intervals to monitor the work environment.

Recommendation 21:
Integrate accountability for the care experience of patients into staff performance review processes.

Recommendation 22:
Foster a culture of learning within the organisation, equally learning from successes and failures, including tragic events, to promote patient-centred care.