



ENABLING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN PRACTICE

Tower Hamlets

Our Latest Newsletter

(07/10/2019)



When we say joy, we mean joy – and here’s why

I was recently with a GP, one who I like, respect, and doesn’t tend to indulge in flattery. In the middle of a rich and honest conversation, he tells me how strident it has felt to him when, in the midst of a complex and distressing consultation, he gets a cheery email from EQUIP popping up to remind him of joy.

The conversation we went on to have has informed these comms, as it became increasingly clear that joy – a word we have chosen intentionally and in the face of open challenge – is subject to interpretation and irritation.

Let’s be clear: we are aware that the word joy gets reactions. Sometimes allergic ones. Verbal marmite. That is, in part, *why* we chose it in the first place. Love it or hate it, it will definitely get reactions. *Happiness*, *contentment*, and *meaning* are words that can easily slip by, unlikely to be grabbed for comment. Joy is not: it’s aspirational, ambitious, and slightly alien. All qualities in service of the task.

Joy is not, however, the idea that the nuances of human emotion are to be steamrollered over with a smiling emoji. That work each day is easy, that our patients’ illness and deprivation are to be forgotten the moment they leave the room, that dealing with pain and even death is experienced as cheerful. If we want to be technical about it, joy has nothing to do with any of these things. If it helps to draw pictures, this is how the Institute of Healthcare Improvement visualizes joy:



Joy is not fun for the sake of it. It's not ungrounded silliness, or the lack of respect for pain, fatigue, or long hours.

Joy is the experience of a meaningful life, in the happiness, in the sadness, in the fullness of its moments.

Joy is the humbling experience of offering care, and the privilege of enabling any betterment where this is possible. Joy is knowing that what you do is worthwhile. It is connection, it is authenticity.

Joy is, in the simplest way possible, the sense of having participated in something that matters. Going home at the end of the day knowing that you've participated in something that *matters to you*, and have asked others, including the patients, *what matters to them*.

This is what we are in service of. Not glib versions of cheeriness and delight. We are in service of many acts of change and presence which nurture clinical and psychological safety, purpose, autonomy, recognition, teamwork, development, and measurement.

This, for us, is joy. This is the word that best describes our aspirations for ourselves and for our wider community, and we hope that, next time you hear the word joy

being used in Tower Hamlets, you will know it's being used in the fullness of its nuances and ambitions. And you will also know why we could never reduce it to just happiness.

With joy,

Virginia