

## Can A&E learn from Contact Centres?



Last week saw the news that A&E waiting times have reached their highest levels in England. This news was of particular interest to me as my local Hospital appeared in the Top 10 worst performing in terms of the wait times by the BBC. This is of course worrying but then I started to think about what that means and how does it relate to the world that I operate in, Customer Service.

For many years, the main measures of customer service were the length of time that it took to answer a telephone call. The introduction of Auto Attendant and Queuing made this a little better but the prime measure was still based upon wait times, just as they appear to be in A&E.

When I look at what is important to most customers now it is the outcome of their interaction.

Have they been listened to?

Has their enquiry been resolved effectively and efficiently?

Have they been treated respectfully?

Do they understand what is going to happen next?

Did they manage to get the response they wanted at the first point of contact?

Were they able to seek reassurance?

All of these items are key measures of performance that are now more important to most customers that whether it takes 22 or 33 seconds to get answered.

The use of targets and measures drives behaviours. It would be relatively cheap to provide a poor service that responds quickly to customers needs. But of course this is wasteful and expensive in the long term.

We need to see a more balanced measure of performance than a single metric. The Top 10 worst performers are identified (surely it should not be the Top 10 Worst) but only based upon the wait times. What about the quality of service received when patients are seen/customers are served? How successful is the treatment/service? How satisfied are customers.

On a related point, why are we fascinated by failure? We all know that there are issues with the NHS but why is there a focus on the worst performing areas? Could we not celebrate the Top 10 performers?

Of course nobody wants to wait. But I would certainly wait a little longer and be seen by somebody that I know is focused on providing me with excellent service. I feel that A&E departments could learn from organisations delivering customer service and provide a balanced view of both qualitative and quantitative performance.